



Destiny's Wings

***Four Months in Day Bombardment:
The Story of Lt. Hugh S. Thompson,
96th Aero Squadron,
U.S. Army Air Service
in World War I***

By Hugh T. Harrington

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Lt. Hugh S. Thompson,
96th Aero Squadron,
U.S. Army Air Service in World War I*

HUGH T. HARRINGTON

Cover photograph of Hugh Smith Thompson: author's collection

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DEDICATION

To the Red Devils of the 96th Aero Squadron and all American
airmen who have flown after them.

*Today, when United States bombers fly, no matter how fast, how high
or how far they fly, they are always flying in the ghostly prop wash of
the ten men of the 96th Aero Squadron who, on June 12, 1918, flew the
first-ever American bombing mission.*

Let us not forget:

Major Harry M. Brown

1st Lt. Durwood L. MacDonald

1st Lt. Joseph M. Mellen

1st Lt. Henry C. Lewis

1st Lt. Charles P. "Pat" Anderson

2nd Lt. Howard G. Rath

2nd Lt. Alfred R. Strong

2nd Lt. Rowan H. Tucker

1st Lt. Claxton H. Tichenor

1st Lt. Hugh S. Thompson

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FOREWORD

My serious involvement with Lt. Hugh Smith Thompson originated in 2007 when I was asked by my cousin William “Bill” Glasgow Thompson,¹ a nephew of Hugh S. Thompson, to research the history of his uncle. At that time, I only knew that Hugh had been a flyer in World War I who had been shot down and killed. As Bill Thompson was getting on in years, I researched and wrote as quickly as I could. He was pleased with the result.

A decade passed. I began to have a nagging thought that I might be able to improve on the story of Hugh S. Thompson’s life and the history of the 96th Aero Squadron. Those interested in World War I bombing history might find it of value. Therefore, I renewed the quest.

One difficulty in providing a comprehensive account of the 96th Squadron may never be overcome. The problem is that much of the history of the squadron has been presented by only two men. The 96th Aero Squadron history, which appears in the massive and indispensable *Gorrell’s History of the A.E.F. Air Services 1917-19*, was written in 1918-1919 almost exclusively by 96th squadron pilots Bruce C. Hopper² and David H. Young. Hopper also wrote, in 1919, an unpublished history of the squadron and a long commentary on aerial bombardment procedures and tactics titled *When the Air Was Young*. Further, Hopper, in 1957, wrote an article for the journal *Air Power Historian* titled “American Day Bombardment in World War I” which is an excerpt from *When the Air Was Young*. David H. Young gave taped interviews to Edward L. Leiser, which appeared in the journal *Cross & Cockade* in 1971 as “Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron.” Almost all histories involving the 96th Squadron rely heavily on the works of Hopper and Young. Other than the major primary sources of *Gorrell’s History* and the works of Hopper and Young only a few primary sources are available. I regret

¹ William “Bill” Glasgow Thompson, 1927-2010.

² After the War, beginning in 1925, Bruce C. Hopper was a professor of Government and International Affairs at Harvard University. During WWII he served as Historian, Eighth Air Force, and Historian, U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe.

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that there was not more information from the diaries, letters and personal journals of the men of the 96th Aero Squadron readily available. Perhaps, in the next hundred years they will turn up.

It is my hope that this greatly expanded biography of Lt. Hugh S. Thompson, despite its flaws, will shed light for future generations on his life, his service, and the 96th Aero Squadron during its first five months of operations.

Hugh T. Harrington³
Gainesville, Georgia

September 16, 2019

³ Hugh Thompson Harrington, 1950-

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO WORLD WAR I

World War I was known as The Great War for a reason. The number and extent of nations, continents, troops and colonies involved made it the first true *world* war. What started out as an insignificant conflict between Austria-Hungary and the Serbs rapidly spiraled in magnitude beyond anyone's conception. The spark of the conflict was Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination on June 28, 1914 at the hands of a Bosnian revolutionary.

The opponents turned for help to their respective allies. Numerous alliances had been signed by countries prior to 1914, and these alliances called upon some countries to declare war if one of their allies declared war first. So began a chain reaction of allies turning to other allies, with the result that soon the nations of the world were seemingly unavoidably pulled into the ever-expanding conflict. Within weeks, every major nation became enmeshed in the fight. Germany invaded neutral Belgium. Britain issued an ultimatum to Germany requiring the Germans to get out of Belgium by midnight August 3, 1914. The ultimatum was ignored and on August 4, 1914, honoring their alliance with Belgium, Britain declared war on Germany, and so it began.

The Western Front, a 350-mile continuous line of parallel and secondary trenches that stretched from the English Channel to the Swiss frontier, was deadlocked from a few months after the war's start in 1914 until a few months before its end in 1918. Battles, some lasting for months, along the Western Front resulted in many thousands of casualties with advances often measured in yards or a few insignificant miles.

However, the four-year conflict was different from all others in how the War was fought. There was rapid growth of new, and improved, military weapons systems during the war.

For the first time tanks appeared. They could clear barbed wire obstructions and cross enemy trenches allowing the infantry to rapidly advance.

Horrific toxic gases such as chlorine, phosgene, diphosgene and

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mustard gas were widely used. Battlefields could be blanketed with these chemical substances delivered from artillery and mortar rounds. Casualties from gas alone totaled nearly half a million men.

Machine guns appeared in huge numbers and their usage evolved as innovative tactics were refined to a science. The same can be said for artillery that was used extensively in vast numbers firing enormous quantities of shells of all types and sizes.

Aircraft were specifically designed for various purposes. Observation and reconnaissance planes, fighters known as pursuit planes, and bombers quickly evolved in speed, maneuverability and load carrying capacity. Bombsights were developed that appeared to aid bombing accuracy. Developments were made in the new field of aerial bombs. Some bombs were designed for anti-personnel usage. Others were incendiaries to cause fires, while most were high explosive bombs for destruction of buildings or railroads. Machine guns were adapted to fire through spinning propellers. Gas filled airships such as Zeppelins were used as bombing platforms. Aerial photography was developed to assess bomb damage and enemy troop movements.

As we shall see, Hugh Smith Thompson was among the very first U.S. airmen involved in bombing. But first, we need to know more about Hugh Smith Thompson.

CHAPTER 2

WHO WAS HUGH SMITH THOMPSON?

Hugh Smith Thompson was born into a family with a strong military tradition. His grandfather, the first Hugh Smith Thompson,⁴ graduated in 1856 from The Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina. During the Civil War, holding the Confederate rank of Captain, his grandfather was not just an instructor; he also commanded a company of Citadel cadets in combat. In later years his grandfather was governor of South Carolina.

In 1898, Hugh's father, John Means Thompson,⁵ saw combat in the Spanish American War serving as a Lieutenant with the 71st Regiment, New York Volunteer Infantry in Cuba. As Hugh was born on February 5, 1895, among his earliest childhood memories would have been of his father in uniform.

Although Hugh was born in Nashville, Tennessee, the family moved to New York City when he was an infant and his two elder brothers not much older. Hugh's father was involved in real estate as well as a lifelong association with the New York State National Guard. Hugh's mother, Sarah Glasgow Thompson,⁶ was a mother and housewife.

Hugh's eldest brother, John Means Thompson, Jr.,⁷ was also destined for the Air Service. The middle brother, William Glasgow Thompson,⁸ who used "Glasgow" as his given name, attended Staunton Military Academy before graduating from The Citadel in 1914. He too was to serve in World War I (WWI).

Hugh was, and is, sometimes confused with his first cousin, Hugh Smith Thompson,⁹ who will, for clarity, hereafter be referred to as "HST Infantry." HST Infantry was the son of Hugh's uncle Thomas

⁴ Hugh S. Thompson, 1836-1904.

⁵ John Means Thompson, 1864-1934.

⁶ Sarah Glasgow Thompson, 1872-1932.

⁷ John Means Thompson, 1891-1967.

⁸ William Glasgow Thompson, 1893-1966.

⁹ Hugh S. Thompson, 1893-1961. Referred to in this history as "HST Infantry."

Clarkson Thompson¹⁰ and his wife Clara Maybelle Berry¹¹ of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Hugh, the future flyer and focus of this work, was often referred to as “Hugh S. Thompson, 3rd,”¹² to help identify him.

To further add to the confusion, these two Hughs were of a similar age. Hugh, the future airman, was born February 5, 1895, seventeen months after his cousin, HST Infantry, who was born August 20, 1893. Both served in WWI as 1st Lieutenants. Hugh S. Thompson served in the Aviation Section, Signal Corps (ASSC). This organization was the flying arm of the United States military. In 1918, the name was changed to Air Service, Signal Corps.

In WWI, HST Infantry was to become a 1st Lieutenant in Company L, 168th Infantry Regiment, 42nd Rainbow Division. The U.S. military was not always able to keep the cousins distinct as they frequently received each other's mail. We will see more of HST Infantry later.

Hugh, the future flyer, attended Staunton Military Academy, in Staunton, Virginia. He may not have graduated as his name does not appear in any yearbook.¹³ His military training at the school would be a great benefit in the near future, giving him a leg up over other civilians with no military training, when Hugh volunteered for Officer Training in WWI.

Prior to 1916, Hugh began working in New York in the commercial department of The American Telephone and Telegraph Company.¹⁴ It is possible that his college-educated brother Glasgow, who had been with AT&T since 1915, may have had a position where he would have been able to help Hugh get his first job.

It should be remembered that World War I had been in progress since August 1914, yet the United States remained on the sidelines, watching the unspeakable carnage while maintaining its neutrality. To many Americans the war was a European affair and not something in which the United States should become involved.

¹⁰ Thomas Clarkson Thompson, 1860-1938.

¹¹ Clara Maybelle Berry, 1870-1912.

¹² See *New York, Mexican Punitive Campaign Muster Rolls for National Guard, 1916-17. The Evening World* (NY), Oct. 29, 1918, p. 3, announcement of his death.

¹³ Staunton Military Academy History Project. Yearbooks are available online. <http://smahistory.com/sma-yearbooks/> accessed April 14, 2018. The school closed in 1976 and its student enrollment records are lost.

¹⁴ In Memory of Lieut. Thompson, *New York Times*, Jan. 12, 1919, p. 22.



Figure 1. Hugh and probably Miss Helen Clark.

In early 1915 Hugh was a professional dancer and employed as the director of dancing at the Strand Roof Garden, located at Broadway and 47th Street, in New York City.¹⁵ Hugh and a Miss Helen Clark gave a special exhibition of the “Globe Trot” on February 6th. This dance had been introduced at the New York socialite Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish’s¹⁶ New Year’s ball. The dance had “special music” and “includes several steps from the dance of every

country.” The following week it was performed again by Hugh and Miss Clark as a ballroom dance. The couple “created much favor” according to *The Evening Post*.¹⁷

That gig was in the evenings after his day job at AT&T. HST Infantry wrote in the summer of 1917 that he had spent an “enthraling evening” there while Hugh was employed as a dancer “awaiting orders to report for training to the Air Service.”¹⁸ The dancing job seems to

¹⁵ *The Evening Post* [NY], February 6, 1915, p. 34, February 13, 1915, p. 34, February 16, 1915, p. 9. *The New York Times*, January 10, 1917, cited here as it provides an address for the Strand Roof Garden.

¹⁶ Marion “Mamie” Graves Anton Fish, 1853-1915, wife of Stuyvesant Fish, President of Illinois Central Railroad.

¹⁷ *The Evening Post* [NY], February 6, 1915, p. 34, February 13, 1915, p. 34, February 16, 1915, p. 9.

¹⁸ Thompson, Hugh S., *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press), 2004, p. 6. HST Infantry wrote a series of

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have been one that was available to Hugh at his convenience.

The War in Europe supplied horror in vast quantities, but at first the War did not involve Americans in any significant degree. However, when the ocean liner RMS *Lusitania* was torpedoed by a German U-boat off the coast of Ireland on May 7, 1915, many in the United States felt the War was coming to them. The ship was on a voyage from New York to Britain. In eighteen minutes, the ship went down leaving 1,198 passengers and crew to drown. The dead included 128 of the 138 Americans aboard.

Being a New Yorker, Hugh would have been acquainted, at least by sight, with the Cunard liner as it had made over 200 Atlantic crossings. There was a great outcry in Britain and the United States. Many thought, and even hoped, that the sinking would bring the U.S. into the War. While hotly debated within the U.S. government, no action was taken. To the director of dancing at the Strand Roof Garden, the War in Europe may suddenly have been brought closer to home. He was 20 years old and physically fit. Was he to become involved in the War and if so in what way?

reminiscences about his experiences in World War I for the *Chattanooga Times* newspaper in 1934. These have been collected and published in book form as *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*. The Hugh cousins met a couple of times, and corresponded, while in France.

CHAPTER 3

ALONG THE MEXICAN BORDER

In the Spring of 1916, Hugh had more on his mind than dancing and the telephone company. The distant French city of Verdun became the centerpiece in a huge battle between the Germans and the French. The battle raged from mid-February to mid-December. The Germans lost 430,000 men and the French over 550,000. The numbers of combatants, artillery pieces, tons of artillery shells, machine guns and destruction were beyond comprehension to most, especially those isolated on the North American continent.

However, on March 9th, Americans were distracted from the War in Europe by armed Mexicans raiding across the border into the United States. At 4 a.m., the Mexican bandit and revolutionary, Francisco “Pancho” Villa,¹⁹ led a raid with a private army numbering several hundred men against the American town of Columbus, New Mexico, three miles north of the border with Mexico. Villa was beaten off by the 13th U.S. Cavalry regiment stationed at the town. This was a significant skirmish with thousands of rounds of ammunition fired from American machine guns and rifles before the Mexicans withdrew. The burning of the town, pillaging, theft of hundreds of weapons including machine guns, and the loss of life among civilians as well as the military caused widespread fear along the border. It also focused national attention on the long and vulnerable Mexico-U.S. border and, momentarily, away from the War in Europe.

Reaction from the United States was swift and forceful. President Woodrow Wilson authorized the Mexican Punitive Expedition against Pancho Villa. This was not to be an attack on the sovereign state of Mexico but rather a mission to aid Mexican authorities with the capture, or killing, of Pancho Villa. Only six days after the Villa raid, Brigadier General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing led a force of thousands of cavalry and infantry across the border into Mexico. For

¹⁹ Francisco “Pancho” Villa, 1878-1923.

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the first time in U.S. military history aircraft were to accompany the American forces.

As Pershing moved deeper into Mexico, defense of his stretching supply line rapidly used up all available regular army forces in the area. President Wilson called up the National Guard from Texas, Arizona and New Mexico on May 8th. However, these states were only able to supply a few thousand additional men. More were needed, many more.

The American operation in Mexico was not popular and there was a real fear in Washington that war with Mexico was imminent. The President called up the National Guard from all the states with immediate effect on June 18, 1916. Soon 140,000 National Guardsman would be moving toward the border with Mexico.

Hugh, although a part-time dancer and full-time employee of AT&T, anticipated the coming crisis and wanted to be part of it. He had enlisted in the 1st Cavalry, Company H, Troop C, New York State National Guard on May 29, 1916 as a private. His enlistment was for 3 years. He first presented himself on June 19th, the day after the call-up. Records show he was aged 21, 5 feet 9.5 inches tall, dark complexion, brown eyes, dark brown hair. His civilian occupation was listed as a clerk. He gave two addresses: 32 E. 45th St. NYC, the home of his parents, and 217 Broadway, NYC, the location of The Astor House hotel. He was mustered in on June 28th.²⁰

Some of the New York City men were permitted to sleep at their homes; others were quartered at the armories. During the day, they drilled at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx getting themselves, their equipment and their horses ready for the journey to Brownsville, Texas.

The cavalymen could not help but learn through the newspapers that a tremendous artillery barrage was taking place in France and had been for days as a prelude before an infantry attack, at a place which was to become infamous: The Somme.

The Battle of the Somme began on July 1st. It was a combined British and French operation that was hoped to be decisive. The battle raged for 141 days. Three million men took part and fully one third of them, one million men on all sides, became casualties. On the first day, July 1st, the British Army suffered 57,000 casualties; 20,000

²⁰ New York, Mexican Punitive Campaign Muster Rolls for National Guard, 1916-1917, Hugh S. Thompson, www.ancestry.com accessed July 20, 2018.

British soldiers were killed. It was the single bloodiest day in the history of the British Army. In the end, after months of fighting, the Allies gained only 7 miles.

In New York the five hours after Reveille at 4:00 a.m. on July 1st were spent breaking camp. Broadway was lined by cheering crowds as the 1st New York Cavalry rode to the Yonkers train station. At that very moment of jubilation in New York, 3700 miles away at the Somme, the huge British, French and German forces were tearing themselves apart in a bloodbath that would forever be remembered for its unspeakable gore and futility. The 1st New York Cavalry arrived at the Mexican border a week later.²¹

The New York units were camped at the tiny hamlets of Pharr, McAllen and Mission, Texas about 60 miles west of Brownsville, near the mouth of the Rio Grande. It was very hot, very dry, very flat and very sparsely settled desert country.²²

While the U.S. excursion into Mexico was not meant as an attack on the national government or the sovereignty of Mexico, the Mexican authorities were very concerned, even alarmed, with what many south of the border considered an invasion by the United States. Efforts were made to avoid troop clashes, and diplomatic channels were continually operating to calm the situation.

However, in July 1916, the troops and their officers along the border believed that they would be involved in a war with Mexico. Many tactical exercises or maneuvers were carried out combining the infantry, artillery and cavalry units. The infantry and cavalry made a joint 110-mile practice march. A modern rifle range was constructed allowing training units to be deployed for combat, advancing upon the “enemy” hidden in the brush. “Enemy” targets were simulated individuals and groups lying prone, kneeling and standing. There was even an “enemy” trench manned by silhouettes that was attacked by the National Guard. These targets were of the knock-down variety and could be reset by wires pulled by men in safety pits. While this preparation for combat was not required for an invasion of Mexico, it

²¹ Cavalry Troops Leave for Texas, *The New York Times*, June 30, 1916, p. 2. New York Units at the Mexican Border, 1916-1917, NY State Unit History Project, https://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/mexBorder/mexBorder_history_ORyan.htm, accessed 4/1/2018.

²² O’Ryan, General John F., *The Story of the 27th Division*, New York: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Company, 1921. Unless otherwise cited all material concerning the 1st Cavalry on the Mexico border is from this source.

served the men well a couple of years later in France.

Life along the border was not to be relieved by alcohol nor visiting houses of prostitution. Guards were placed on such establishments to ensure the guardsmen did not indulge in these vices. Upon arrival, a standing order was issued prohibiting the consumption of alcohol and entering any building where alcohol was served or consumed.

After a few months it became apparent that the diplomats had succeeded. There would be no war with Mexico. Also, the presence of 150,000 guardsman along the border had ended the raids by Mexican bandits, bringing the crisis to a close. However, it would be months before the men of the 1st Cavalry would return to New York.

While on the border the guardsmen produced their own newspaper *The Rio Grande Rattler*, conducted boxing and wrestling matches, and in late September even had a "Frontier Day" where guardsmen would compete against local cowboys and vaqueros in bronco busting, riding and roping. Surprisingly the best bronc busters were not locals but rather privates from the Field Artillery and from the New York 1st Cavalry. One can but wonder if Hugh Thompson made an appearance in the competitions.

Hugh's tour of duty along the border was not very exciting, glamorous nor particularly interesting. The muster roll indicates that he had been, for at least part of the time, a mail clerk and a cook.²³ However, it was certainly different from being in New York. One may be tempted to leap to the conclusion that Hugh saw aircraft in use during the Punitive Expedition and he was instilled with the adventure of flying; however, that seems quite unlikely. The few aircraft, used for reconnaissance and mail delivery, operated out of Columbus, New Mexico, 800 miles to the northwest of the 1st Cavalry's camp near McAllen, Texas, which is near the tip of southern Texas. They would not have been seen by Hugh. However, it is quite possible that the glamor and excitement of flying that was sweeping the country due to the aerial combat in Europe was imparted in Hugh at this time.

The 1st Cavalry was the last of the New York National Guard units to return home. Hugh arrived in New York on March 5, 1917 and was mustered out of the 1st Cavalry on March 20th. Although not on duty he was not discharged and was still a member of the New York National Guard. Two weeks later, on April 6, 1917, the United States

²³ New York, Mexican Punitive Campaign Muster Rolls for National Guard, 1916-1917 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013.

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declared war on Germany.

The country was immediately swept by a passion for arms, which propelled men into recruiting offices. Crowds went into the streets singing patriotic songs such as George M. Cohan's snappy propaganda tune, "Over There," with the compelling lines such as, "The Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming" and "we'll be over, coming over and we won't be back until it's over, over there." The rush was on to enlist in the great adventure of a lifetime. And, the most attractive military service for huge numbers of young men was in the air.

CHAPTER 4 THE YANKS ARE COMING

The First World War had been raging in Europe, with horrific casualties, since 1914. Now, on April 6, 1917, almost three years later, the United States entered the war. It would seem inconceivable were it not true, but the United States military was almost entirely unprepared for war.

America's first WWI ace, Douglas Campbell, in describing his first contact with U.S. military aviation wrote "In my effort to serve in [the American air arm], I spent a complete day in Washington looking for its office. By chance, the next day, I found the one-room, rented office of the Aviation Section, Signal Corps of the Army, occupied by Captain Thomas D. Milling and a secretary."²⁴

Not a single U.S. squadron had been trained for combat. On the rare occasions when the Army staff did think of aircraft, they thought in terms of observation duties rather than combat. Hence aircraft operations were under the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps of the Army. The Army had two flying fields and a total of fifty-five trainer-type aircraft. There was not a single combat-type aircraft in the inventory. Not a single pilot in the U.S. Army had any combat experience. The entire Aviation Section boasted only 131 officers, mostly pilots, and 1,087 enlisted men.²⁵

Astonishingly, there were no plans for building up an air force capable of fighting in Europe. The U.S. had not even sent observers or technical specialists to Europe to examine the aircraft of our allies nor obtain operational information. The U.S. was starting from scratch. To compound the problem the minuscule U.S. aircraft industry was utterly incapable of producing aircraft or aircraft engines,

²⁴ Cameron, Rebecca Hancock, *Training to Fly, Military Flight Training 1907-1945* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1999), p. 107. Quoted from Lucien H. Thayer, *America's First Eagles: The Official History of the U.S. Air Service, A.E.F.* (San Jose, Cal.: R. James Bender, and Mesa, Az: Champlin Fighter Museum Press, 1983), Foreword.

²⁵ Hudson, James J., *Hostile Skies, A Combat History of the American Air Service in World War I* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968), p. 3.

even if they knew what to manufacture, in any sizeable quantities. In 1916, the U.S. factories only managed to deliver sixty-four of the 366 aircraft ordered by the military. There was an almost complete lack of knowledge by both the manufacturers and by the government as to what was required for the construction of a modern aircraft or engine.²⁶ It was fortunate that 3000 miles of Atlantic separated the U.S. from the enemy as the country was utterly defenseless in the air.

Six weeks after the U.S. declared war, a bombshell telegram arrived on President Woodrow Wilson's desk. The French Premier, Alexandre F. Ribot, requested the United States supply 4,500 aircraft, 5,000 pilots and 50,000 mechanics along with whatever supplementary personnel, equipment and material that would allow the Allies to gain air supremacy. It was hoped that all of this would be available in the Spring of 1917. Clearly, the Premier had an extraordinarily high opinion of American industrial might and organizational skills. War fever, or enthusiasm, swept this proposal through channels.

The Joint Army and Navy Technical Board as well as the Departments of the Navy and War all approved the enormous undertaking on May 27th, only three days after the Premier's telegram had reached President Wilson.²⁷ One wonders how much critical study was given to the almost insurmountable difficulties involved.

Major Benjamin D. Foulois,²⁸ the ranking flying officer, was tasked with working out the details of this vast undertaking. He and his staff, which included then-young Henry H. "Hap" Arnold,²⁹ worked out the details, on paper, in only a few days. Not being at all fazed by the enormity of the assignment, they expanded it. In fact, they greatly expanded it. Their program would, on paper, bring forth 22,625 aircraft and a training program that would graduate 6,210 pilots from primary schools. On top of that, 45,000 engines and related spare parts would also, in some miraculous way, appear in less than a year.³⁰

The public was caught up in the patriotic excitement of the war, the romance of flying, and this gigantic logistical proposal. The officers of the Aviation Section involved were overwhelmed and

²⁶ Hudson, *Hostile Skies*, p. 3.

²⁷ Hudson, *Hostile Skies*, p. 5.

²⁸ Foulois is pronounced to rhyme with "to cloy" as "Foo-loi."

²⁹ Henry "Hap" Arnold, 1885-1950, was to become commanding General of the U.S. Army Air Forces in WWII.

³⁰ Hudson, *Hostile Skies*, p. 5.

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staggered by the enormity of the project. The task of training huge numbers of pilots when the Aviation Section had so few pilots to use for instructors was daunting, to say the least. To make matters worse the Aviation Section could not fall back on the private sector as there were no civilian flying programs. It is no surprise to find that this was a recipe for chaos and confusion.

We will leave the problems of aircraft design and manufacturing aside and examine only pilot training. The Americans wisely looked to Canada for a guide in establishing training programs as the Canadian training program had been in place for over two years. It was decided that ground schools of eight weeks would lead successful candidates to primary flight training. After completion of primary the next step would be to an advanced school for specific instruction in observation, pursuit (fighter), or bombardment.

CHAPTER 5

TRAINING IN THE UNITED STATES

Officer Training School – Plattsburgh, NY

Aviation ground schools were quickly established at the Universities of Texas, California, Illinois, Ohio State, Cornell, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Princeton and Georgia School of Technology (Georgia Tech). The ground schools were operated independently from the host institutions that housed them. Staffing the schools was a problem. Early ground school graduates were often sent to Canada for ground school instructor training then returned to the ground schools they had just graduated from to be instructors. A cadet would be an enlisted man throughout ground training. It was only after primary flight training that he would receive the Reserve Military Aviator rating.

However, before one could get into the aviation ground school, which was the first step to becoming a pilot, the man had to go through officer candidate training and at graduation be selected for the coveted aviation ground school. Otherwise he was assigned to another branch of the armed services.

In the spring of 1917, Hugh had ideas about his future that did not include the New York National Guard. Perhaps he had heard that the 1st Cavalry was to be broken up and formed into the 104th and 106th Machine Gun Battalions. More likely, he was swept up in the widespread romance and glamor of aviation. Whatever the reason he applied for a position in the Reserve Officer Candidate Training Camp at Plattsburgh, New York. He received his appointment by letter on May 31st. On June 11, 1917, he was discharged from the 1st Cavalry.³¹

On Hugh's first day at the camp in Plattsburgh, June 11th, he

³¹ New York Guard Service Cards, 1906-1918, www.ancestry.com, [database online]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015. He is listed as "Hugh B. Thompson" by Ancestry but clearly the card itself reads, "Hugh S. Thompson, 3rd."

applied for ground school upon graduation.³² Aviation was by far the most popular branch of the service among the cadets. The camp at Plattsburgh was intended to transform civilians into army officers. No specialty field was involved. That would come after graduation, when a successful candidate's qualifications would, at least in theory, send him to a school in the field where he was most qualified.

Days were filled with much drilling, physical training, long-distance marches and lessons on military protocol and deportment. After rigorous physical examinations, fortunate cadets were selected to go to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for aviation ground school. The plan was to send twenty-five men each week. However, the congestion at M.I.T. kept some cadets at Plattsburgh longer than initially planned simply because they could not be accommodated at M.I.T.

Ground School – Massachusetts Institutes of Technology

After only a week at Officer Candidate School at Plattsburgh, Hugh was ordered to M.I.T. for ground school. With the rush to move men through the system it is very likely that Hugh's military background in the 1st Cavalry and Staunton Academy allowed him to skip almost all of Plattsburgh's officer training course and be ordered to ground school at M.I.T. to start on Monday June 18th.

In a somewhat odd letter, Chief Signal Officer, Major General George O. Squier,³³ pronounced "Square", wrote the President of Harvard, A. Lawrence Lowell,³⁴ suggesting that the candidates best suited for aviation were "Athletes who are quick-witted, punctual and reliable. Intelligent men accustomed to making quick decisions are highly desirable. Men who ride well, can sail a fast boat or handle a motorcycle usually make good air pilots."³⁵ Having spent a year in the 1st Cavalry, Hugh could probably ride very well. And his skill as a dancer would qualify him as being athletic. In any case, he had made the leap into ground school, a major step toward obtaining his wings.

Twenty-five men arrived at M.I.T. from Plattsburgh and were

³² Aviation Attracts 111 Plattsburghers, *The Sun* [New York], June 12, 1917.

³³ George O. Squier, 1865-1934.

³⁴ Abbott Lawrence Lowell, 1856-1943, President of Harvard, 1909-1933.

³⁵ Cameron, *Training to Fly*, p. 115.

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formed into a new squadron on Monday, June 18th.³⁶ Hugh almost certainly was one of those men. The eight-week course at M.I.T. starting Monday, June 18th would end on Friday, August 10th.³⁷

M.I.T. could handle only 200 cadets at a time with a new class enrolling every week. There were far more eager young men coming as recruits than could possibly be handled by the ground school. Some, naturally, were unsuitable for aviation and were dropped. Others, a great many others, were dropped for no particular reason other than to thin the numbers. No disgrace was placed on those who washed out as the process was clearly oriented toward diminishing the ranks.

The stated purpose and scope of the ground school course was

³⁶ Peck, Charles E., editor, *Allen Peck's WWI Letters Home, 1917-1919*, (New York: IUniverse, 2005), p. 5.

³⁷ Consistent with these dates is that on Monday, August 13th newly graduated Hugh was at Fort Wood in New York Harbor awaiting transportation to France. There he would complete the next phase of his training, primary flight training. See New York, Abstracts of World War I Military Service, 1917-1919 for Hugh S. Thompson.

Thompson, Hugh S		White 2 1/2
(Surname)	(Christian name)	(Army serial number) (Race: White or colored)
Residence:	22 E 45 St New York	NEW YORK
	(Street and house number) (Town or city) (County)	(State)
* Enlisted in	ERC at Ft Wood N Y	Aug 13/17
† Born in	Nashville Tenn	22 6/12 yrs
Organizations:	AS Inst Det to disch	
Grades:	Pvt 1 Cl	Aug 13/17
Engagements:		
Wounds or other injuries received in action: None.		
† Served overseas:	Aug 23/17 to disch.	
§ Hon. disch.	Jan 10/18 To accept Commission	
Was reported	per cent disabled on date of discharge, in view of occupation.	
Remarks:	assigned to active duty at enlistment	
Form No. 724-2 1/2 A. G. O. March 12, 1920.		
* Insert "R. A.", "N. G.", "E. R. C.", "N. A.", as case may be, followed by place and date of enlistment. † Give place of birth and date of birth, or age at enlistment. ‡ Give dates of departure from and arrival in the United States. § Give date and cause.		

Ancestry.com accessed April 5, 2018. "ERC" [Enlisted Reserve Corps] at Ft. Wood, NY Aug 13, 1917. It states that Hugh is Pvt. 1st Class and "AS Inst. Det to disch" which indicates that Hugh is in the Aviation Section, instructor detached to discharge. It also shows that Hugh "served overseas August 23, 1917 to disch." August 23rd is the date of departure of Hugh's ship, RMS *Baltic*. In addition, it is stated that Hugh received his commission January 10, 1918.

described as follows:

Great stress was laid on the importance of developing ability to observe artillery fire and to cooperate with both artillery and infantry. The importance of a thorough knowledge of the machine gun, the internal combustion motor, and wireless telegraphy was emphasized. We decided to adopt the British method of dividing the course into two parts: the first of three weeks, chiefly military studies and infantry drill; the second, of five weeks, technical aeronautics, with particular emphasis on guns and motors.³⁸

Hugh Thompson did not leave behind letters nor a description of his time at M.I.T. However, fortune has smiled upon the historian as Hugh's silence was replaced by fellow cadet, Allen Peck, who told their story in letters home.³⁹

Allen Peck arrived at M.I.T. the morning of Friday June 8, 1917. The class was divided into three squadrons which drilled for three hours that first afternoon, then ran for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. Some compared the strict discipline to being in jail. The fifteen-man squadrons would march to all activities. Reveille was at 5:30 a.m. and lights out was at 9:30 p.m. The cadets ate at 6:15, 12:15 and 6:15. The first two weeks at ground school would be mostly physical exercise except for daily two-hour lectures.

Most of the cadets awoke with sore muscles. After breakfast there was a Commanding Officer's inspection that lasted an hour. Besides drilling, the squadron had lectures on the organization of armies in the field. They also had an hour learning the basics of wireless (radio) using Morse Code. The barracks were far from being spartan having large tables and comfortable lounge chairs overlooking the Charles River. During off hours students practiced wireless, sending code with "buzzer" units while others were playing ukuleles and singing. If it was a "jail," it was a pretty luxurious one.

Each week more and more students arrived creating new squadrons. In theory the school was to have eight 25-man squadrons and the course was to take eight weeks. The squadrons were not all

³⁸ Major Hiram Bingham, Signal Officers' Reserve Corps, who had studied the Canadian system of instruction, quoted in Cameron, *Training to Fly*, p. 112.

³⁹ Peck, *Letters*.

on the same schedule as they were created at different times. At this time the school had been operating for four weeks. So, the senior squadron was done with the intensive drilling portion and was now spending the remainder of their training period with emphasis on theory, hands on mechanics, etc.

There were now seven squadrons with about 175 men and officers at M.I.T. The coursework included the mechanics and operation of a machine gun, which was taught by an instructor from Canada. The cadets were required to take the guns entirely apart, learn the name and function of each part and reassemble the weapon. They worked with the Bennet-Mercier gun and later would move on to the Lewis gun and a Colt machine gun.

The wireless sending test required that the cadet be able to send, without error, 280 units per minute. The men were practicing the art of telegraphy in much of their spare time. In one squadron eighteen of the twenty-five men passed the test. Six men were able to send 280 units in fifty seconds or better. One talented man did it in forty-three seconds, to the envy of his classmates.

The Theory of Flight course was popular although it contained more mathematics than many of the men felt comfortable with. To make matters worse all were worried as at the end of the eight weeks they would have a comprehensive examination covering everything they were to have learned.

After a month at M.I.T. the men were still wearing the clothing they had brought with them as no uniforms had been issued. Such was the confusion in the rush to train huge numbers of men for the War that the pay for the men had not come through either. They did not even know what rate of pay they were to receive.

The course on the theory and practical use of gasoline engines was popular with the men probably as most had some experience with them. There were several types of engines that they completely took apart and reassembled, including the ignition systems. Three of the engines were of the type found in Curtiss airplanes. They also had a Curtiss JN-4, the famous Jenny, which they would take apart and reassemble, but not fly.

Time and emphasis were placed on the wireless including the codes used to direct artillery fire. Map reading was also one of the more practical courses.

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Not all was work, however. A Boston lady, a Mrs. Cunningham,⁴⁰ who had an interest in the War and the school, would regularly open the house and grounds of her estate twenty miles outside Boston to the men of the school. She would send four Packard automobiles to pick men up in the morning and then return them to the school in the evening. The grounds included a golf course and swimming pool.

As the course progressed several men had been dropped, which caused those remaining men to become increasingly worried.



Figure 2. Hugh with his mother, Sarah Glasgow Thompson, sometime in 1917.

On July 21st the 2nd squadron graduated. Thirteen of these men were sent to primary flight training at Essington, Pennsylvania and the rest of them were sent to New York to sail to France where they were to receive their primary flight training.

None of these graduates were allowed leave nor were they told in what ship they would sail. The end was in sight for Hugh and Allen Peck. Only a few more weeks to go until graduation on about August 10.

⁴⁰ Probably a Mrs. Edward Cunningham.

CHAPTER 6

VOYAGE TO EUROPE

August 13th, 1917 found both Hugh and Allen Peck, now graduates from the ground school at M.I.T., at Fort Wood in New York harbor awaiting transfer to France for primary flight training. They were both Privates 1st Class. The reward for successful completion of ground school was supposed to be a commission in the Signal Officers' Reserve Corps. A cadet remained an enlisted man throughout ground school training. After completion of primary flight training, he would receive his Reserve Military Aviator (RMA) rating.

However, in the confusion of the tiny Aviation Section of the Signal Corps to set up the huge training program, the pledge to give commissions was disregarded in many, but not all cases. Months later, in France, this would cause great discontent amongst the young airmen. In early 1918, commissions were given to all those who had fallen through the cracks. Hugh received his commission on January 10, 1918, more than a month after he was a pilot and 5 months after completion of ground school.

Despite the error, Privates Peck and Thompson moved on to Fort Wood, which was on Bedloe's Island. The name of the island changed in 1957 to Liberty Island. It is the island on which the Statue of Liberty stands. As there were few quarters on the small island, the men were only required to appear at 9 a.m. each morning to report, after which they were allowed to go where they pleased only to report back at 9 a.m. the next morning.⁴¹

The eager future airmen may have learned of the start of the Battle of Passchendaele in Belgium before they left New York. This bloody campaign would last until November 10th accomplishing little yet costing horrendous human casualties. Perhaps it was an indication of the general feeling of optimism of the young men as Allen Peck wrote his parents that, "it will be only a few months before we will all be back again at our old tasks and the old Kaiser will be in different

⁴¹ Peck, *Letters*, p. 18.

circumstances than he was in the past.”⁴² The naive comment conveys the familiar “home by Christmas” refrain from all wars.

Hugh was mentioned in the August 24th issue of the *Columbia* (Tennessee) *Herald* newspaper under the headline “Sergt. Thompson Goes to France, Young Soldier Who Made a Most Enviably Record in Training.” The sergeant rank was a temporary cadet ranking while at M.I.T. The article relates that Hugh, although “very young, was in charge of 200 men while at M.I.T. and is now in command of ten picked aviators to be sent to France at once.”⁴³ Hugh, now twenty-two years old and veteran of the Mexican Punitive Expedition, likely did not think of himself as “very young.”

In the early afternoon of August 22, 1917, Hugh, Allen Peck, and thousands of others boarded the White Star Liner R.M.S. *Baltic* to begin their voyage. Both Hugh and Allen Peck can be found on the ship passenger list rated as “AS SERC” which indicates “Aviation Section, Signal Enlisted Reserve Corps.”⁴⁴ The *Baltic* sailed on Thursday, August 23, 1917, for Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The port of New York, which included Hoboken, NJ, was under control of the Headquarters Port of Embarkation, Hoboken, NJ. To this organization was charged the mammoth task of placing tens of thousands of men and mountains of equipment onto the proper ships at the proper times. When the United States declared war, the Army immediately took possession of the German shipping facilities and ships located in Hoboken. The ships had not been scuttled but were damaged by their crews, which required extensive mechanical repair.

The *Baltic* was a White Star luxury liner under contract to provide transportation for American servicemen. She was built by Harland and Wolff in Belfast and went into service in 1904, being the largest vessel afloat with a length of 725 feet, beam 75 feet and rated at 23,876 tons. The *Baltic* would normally carry a crew of 350 and 3,000

⁴² Peck, *Letters*, p. 18.

⁴³ “Sergt. Thompson Goes to France,” *Columbia Herald* [Columbia, TN], August 24, 1917, p. 2.

⁴⁴ NARA passenger lists. Fold3.com. None of the pages pertaining to the *Baltic* are dated. However, the date of sailing can be identified by the “served overseas Aug 23/17” on Hugh Thompson’s record and also in Allen Peck’s August 27th letter in which he writes that he “left New York last Thursday and are now in a Canadian port.” See Peck, p. 19. The *Baltic* passenger list is confirmed in Peck’s August 22, 1917 letter in which he writes “on board R.M.S. *Baltic*.”

passengers at a speed of sixteen knots or eighteen m.p.h.⁴⁵ On this trip, the *Baltic* carried 2035 passengers including Major Carl "Tooey" Spaatz and future 96th Aero Squadron pilot Lt. David H. Young.⁴⁶

The White Star piers, numbers 48, 49 and 50, were located on the east bank of the Hudson approximately at the intersection of West Street and Bank Street in Manhattan. They are long gone. It is likely that on the afternoon of August 22nd Hugh boarded the *Baltic* at this location.

Leaving the harbor was the exciting start of the great adventure. All aboard waved at the cheering crowd, which likely included Hugh's parents, on the pier as the big ship slowly backed into the Hudson River. A final blast from the horn, the answering toot from the tugs, and the *Baltic* headed down the harbor. The New York City skyline rising high was an impressive sight. On the starboard side was the Statue of Liberty and Fort Wood. The Staten Island Ferry hooted as the ship picked up speed, taking them off to War.

Once out of the harbor there was the first of many lifeboat drills. It was standard practice to keep the lifeboats swung out and provisioned. The ship was blacked out at night as the fear of U-boats was real. The *Baltic* steamed at high speed and zig zagged.

The men enjoyed wonderful quarters and excellent food. There were American and English officers aboard, and other than lifeboat drills the men were at leisure.

The *Baltic* did not sail directly from New York to Liverpool. Instead, she went to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to join a convoy. The *Baltic* would wait for eleven days, with no shore leave, in Halifax before joining a convoy. The men wrote letters, the last they could post before leaving the hemisphere. The mail, however, was heavily censored and would be held for five days after the ship sailed to be sure that no vital information leaked out. With no shore leave men occupied their time reading, playing games and simply walking around the ship. There was a dance on the deck every night while in port. There were quite a few nurses as well as civilians aboard, which

⁴⁵ The *Baltic*, all but forgotten today, is remembered by those interested in the *Titanic* tragedy as being one of the ships that had radioed an ice warning the evening before the *Titanic*'s sinking in 1912.

⁴⁶ Leiser, Edward L., compiler, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," *Cross & Cockade*, Summer 1971, vol. 12, no. 2, p. 157 and Fold3.com *Baltic* passenger list. Carl Spaatz, a strong advocate of air power, in WWII was commander of Strategic Air Forces in Europe.

made for good dances.

The only exercise was during lifeboat drills and a series of lifeboat races held in the harbor.⁴⁷ Hugh, as a former cavalryman, may not have been good with an oar, but he certainly more than held his own as a dancer.

Another impression of a voyage is from Hugh's cousin, Hugh Smith Thompson, of the 42nd Rainbow Division, who is referred to here as "HST Infantry." He had sailed from New York aboard the troopship USAT⁴⁸ *Kroonland* less than three weeks after Hugh's departure. He, too, had waved at the crowd on the pier and got choked up as the ship steamed down the harbor past the Statue of Liberty.

At Halifax, HST Infantry was greatly impressed with the number and variety of vessels of all types, some for peace and some for war. A few were marked with the Red Cross and others with "Belgian Relief" painted in large letters on them.⁴⁹

Unlike the *Baltic*, the *Kroonland* men were granted shore leave and the men swarmed ashore and had a wonderful day at the theater, races and just roaming the city. One man, a Canadian, started a fight taunting the Americans by shouting President Wilson's words, "Too proud to fight."⁵⁰ Local police appeared and restored order.

When the *Kroonland* steamed out of the harbor, women on a bluff were seen wigwagging with semaphore flags: "Good-bye! Good luck! God Bless you!" which brought a lump to HST Infantry's throat. Hugh had probably seen the same women, with the same message, a couple of weeks earlier. HST Infantry imagined a railroad train seen in the distance was heading to New York and he "devoutly" wished to be on it. A passing British warship's band played "The Star-Spangled Banner" which brought the men on the *Kroonland* to attention and a

⁴⁷ Peck, *Letters*, p. 20.

⁴⁸ United States Army Transport.

⁴⁹ The Commission for Belgian Relief was a primarily American organization that negotiated with British and German authorities for the safe conduct of ships loaded with food for Belgian and French citizens in territory occupied by Germany. The ships carried huge "Belgian Relief" signs in hopes German submarines would allow them to pass. Some were torpedoed.

⁵⁰ May 10, 1915, days after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, President Wilson made the "Too Proud to Fight" speech in which he said, "There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight. There is such a thing as a nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right." This neutrality position was unpopular with those who thought the United States should enter the war.

salute. It also added to the feeling of homesickness.⁵¹

“Good-bye! Good Luck! God Bless you!” Doubtless many a young soldier had thoughts of home and unspoken wishes to be going home, or perhaps anywhere else, rather than venturing across the ocean to an unknown fate. Others, still swept up with enthusiasm, were eager to get into the action. Leaving Halifax harbor was leaving security behind and tempting fate in the maws of war.

At this stage of the war, it was standard practice for a convoy to consist of twenty vessels including escorts, merchantmen, and liners. All would make the speed of the slowest to avoid straggling. The crossing would take about ten days. Three years earlier Germany began a policy of unrestricted warfare. Any merchant ship belonging to the enemy or a ship carrying supplies to the enemy was subject to attack without warning. Prior to that time, it was customary to follow the “cruiser rules” whereupon a submarine would surface and require the target ship to submit to search or would remove passengers and crew before sinking the ship.

The British fought the submarines by creating Q-Ships, merchant ships with concealed defensive guns, to sink German submarines who surfaced nearby. The German response was to sink without warning. The convoy was a successful solution to the problem of German submarines. Very few ships were sunk while in convoy. However, isolated or straggling ships suffered a much higher rate of sinking. While it is likely there were submarine alerts and tense moments aboard the *Baltic*, no submarines were detected.

The *Baltic* arrived safely in Liverpool on September 15th.⁵² From there Hugh went by train to Southampton, by way of London, where he would embark on a transport to Le Havre, France.

⁵¹ Thompson, Hugh S., *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*, p. 7.

⁵² Fold3.com Debarkation report as part of the passenger list for S.S. *Baltic*.

CHAPTER 7

PRIMARY FLIGHT TRAINING AT TOURS

After arriving in France, Hugh and so many others faced the chaos of a training program swamped almost to a stand-still. An overflow of pilots in training from the United States were shipped to France, Italy and England with the understanding that in these countries they would receive whatever training was required to turn them into combat pilots.

The great influx of trainees was more, far more, than could be readily handled. Many incoming cadets languished for weeks or even months in an Air Service Concentration Barracks. However, Allen Peck was shipped out almost immediately for primary flight training at the American primary training facility at Issoudun, France where the 3rd Aviation Instruction Center (3rd A.I.C.) was located. He arrived on September 23rd or 24th.⁵³ It is very likely that Hugh received the same orders since their training was in parallel.

Instead of flight training, Hugh and the other cadets performed manual labor, everything from latrine digging to barracks construction. It was clear that this new facility at Issoudun was not equipped to train the men assigned there. There were rumors, but no orders, that they would be sent to Italy for further training. The cadets lived in wooden barracks and ate reasonably good food. Other than the lack of mail, and not having been paid in a month, the main problem was an abundance of insects, fleas, and spiders causing much scratching amongst the laboring cadets.⁵⁴ And, of course, the major problem was that they were not receiving any flight training.

Fortunately, orders were received to go to the 2nd Aviation Instruction Center (2nd A.I.C.) at Tours. Hugh, and Allen Peck, arrived on October 8th. At last Hugh was to receive his primary flight training and would learn to fly over the next two months.⁵⁵

Tours, the 2nd Aviation Instruction Center, was located 125 miles

⁵³ Peck, *Letters*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Peck, *Letters*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ Peck, *Letters*, p. 25.

southwest of Paris and three miles northeast of the city of Tours at what is now a modern city airport.⁵⁶ It was well behind the front lines.

The excitement must have been high after months of drilling, rigorous ground school, delays, scuttlebutt, a transatlantic crossing and an aborted assignment to Issoudun. Hugh would now get his hands on a real airplane and take to the skies. The training facility at Tours was, in theory, turned over by the French to the Americans in September 1917. However, the Americanization took many months to complete.⁵⁷

Tours was overwhelmed, as were the other training centers, by too many students and too few aircraft, equipment and instructors. Later in the war it evolved into the center for the training of aerial observers. It also would include schools for radio, photography, and gunnery. However, in the early days when Hugh Thompson was there, the school was manned by the French who taught primary flying skills in the French manner while the American administration gradually became established. The official transfer took place in mid-November 1917, but the French instructors and maintenance crew were still on site only to be replaced by Americans as they arrived and came up to speed. This transition did not take place until 1918, after Hugh had moved on.⁵⁸

The American plan had been to turn out one hundred pilots a

⁵⁶ 47°25'53.49" N, 0°44'04.91" E.

⁵⁷ Cameron, *Training to Fly*, p. 148; Gorrell, Series J., vol. 7, p. 9. Col. Edgar S., *Gorrell's History of the A.E.F. Air Services 1917-19*, U.S. Army Air Service, 1919. <https://www.fold3.com/image/250/14539656> This is the best, by far, source for all things connected with the air war in World War I. Per NARA:

On the 58 microfilm rolls of this publication are reproduced 282 bound volumes of historical narratives, reports, photographs and other records that document administrative, technical and tactical activities of the Air Service in the American Expeditionary Forces. These records – originals, carbon copies and transcribed copies – are part of Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I), 1917-1923, Record Group 120, publication M990. The history was compiled, not written, by Gorrell or the 119 officers, enlisted men, and civilians engaged in creating the history. The massive compilation by Gorrell was never published and remains the most nearly complete documentation of the history of the AEF Air Service. Vol. E-14 Sq. histories – and N-16 “first army material, histories of the 11th, 20th, 96th and 116th sq. operations” and M-12 Lights and Landings No. 24, p. 9, 96th aero bombings squadron: “interesting Notes from Sgt. Herbert C. Faust.” The official history of the 96th Squadron was written by Bruce C. Hopper a pilot in the 96th Squadron.

⁵⁸ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p 7-9.

month from Tours. The best the French had been able to produce was eighty-two pilots a month. Thus, the American goal was unrealistically optimistic. The disappointing average for the first four months of operation with the Americans was less than forty pilots graduating, with October being the high with fifty-five pilots.⁵⁹

At that time the 2nd A.I.C. boasted only one flying field and suffered from lack of equipment and facilities of all types. A critical shortage was training aircraft. Only fifty to sixty old, worn Caudron G-3 training aircraft were present. They were in poor condition. "Most of the machines were rebuilt from wrecks," and keeping them in flying condition required an effort "approaching heroic."⁶⁰ Crashes, hard landings, regular maintenance and a severe shortage of spare parts greatly influenced the number of aircraft available for flight training at any given time. Cannibalizing wrecked aircraft was essential to keeping the training program viable. Only a few Caudron G-3 planes were still airworthy by the start of 1918.⁶¹

The Caudron G-3 was introduced in 1914 as an observation aircraft, but by 1917, with the rapid advance of aircraft of all types, it was hopelessly obsolete. It was a visual oddity. It appears to the modern eye as an even more primitive craft than most single-engine biplanes. Aft of the engine the crew sat within a short enclosure shaped much like a bathtub. The wooden framework of the twin-boom fuselage was uncovered giving the aircraft a very primitive look. It also sported twin vertical tail fins. The upper wing was almost twice the length of the lower. Instead of two front wheels, the standard Caudron G-3 had two pairs of wheels attached to the landing gear and two tail skids.

It stood eight feet tall, forty-four feet wide and twenty-one feet long. Empty it weighed 926 pounds and had a maximum take-off weight of 1550 pounds. With the eighty horsepower Le Rhone rotary engine, it could attain a maximum speed of sixty-six miles per hour.

⁵⁹ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p. 12.

⁶¹ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p. 12.

It was a perfect speed for a trainer.

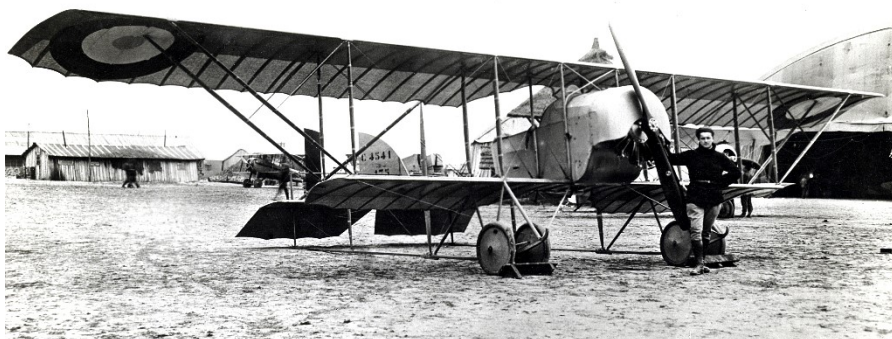


Figure 3. Caudron G-3. © Kees Kort Collection.

The primary flight training version of the Caudron G-3 was equipped with two extra pairs of wheels. These training wheels were mounted forward and above the standard wheels and would not normally be in contact with the ground. However, if the airplane were to nose over with an inexperienced pilot, either when taxiing or when landing, it would be caught by the training wheels.

In early training, with training wheel equipped Caudron G-3s, the student pilots would at first taxi back and forth across the field at various speeds getting used to the feel and necessary movement of the rudder bar required to turn or maintain a straight line while accelerating. This was all done on the ground. Later, when landing, the training wheels would be a safety feature in case the pilot came in too steep.

The young budding aviators, who had probably never flown in any sort of aircraft, likely were somewhat dubious, yet very excited, when they began their training with the Caudron G-3. It was “regarded with amusement or derision” by some. Others thought that it was “not a pretty machine, but stable.” Some thought the Caudron G-3 very strange as it did not have the usual control surfaces on the wings but rather used wing warping, as did the old Wright flyers of ten years earlier.⁶²

As flying training began, it was not only their first flight in an

⁶² Cameron, *Training to Fly*, p. 154.

airplane but also the first time they took the controls themselves. Almost certainly they felt, as did Leonardo da Vinci, that “Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return.” It was a life-changing event seeing the world from above, feeling the freedom, and hearing the wind in the wires. Even those who washed out of the program would never see the sky the same way again. To those who continued, flying often would become a passion.



Figure 4. Caudron with training wheels. © Kees Kort Collection.

The French flight course-work that Hugh Thompson and the other young aviators followed at Tours took, in theory, about four weeks and twenty-five to thirty hours of flying, depending upon the weather, to

complete. They would stay there until they were either dropped from the program or until they received the French Brevet.

The Brevet was earned by having required hours in the air, passing written and oral tests, and having successfully made a number of cross-country flights. The time required to get this status depended on the individual, weather and that uncertain factor: luck. After receiving the Brevet, the pilot was then assigned to an advanced flying school. The brevet insignia was a badge worn on the right breast.⁶³

The primary flight training syllabus consisted of the following:

1. Double control with Instructor: 6 to 8 hours.

Double control classes were divided into morning

⁶³ There is a May 1918 photograph of 12 officers of the 96th Squadron who ferried the Breguets from Clermont-Ferrand to their airfield at Amanty. Hugh Thompson is wearing his pilot wings on his left side and the French Brevet on his right. Hugh is the only officer wearing the Brevet.

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and afternoon groups, each instructor having seven students. A student was kept under double control instruction until, in the opinion of the instructor, he was capable of flying by himself. Each instructor was allowed to use his own method.

2. Solo landing: minimum of 14 hours total in the air – 28 solo landings.

After completing his first successful solo flight, the student was sent to the Solo Field to make short turns around the field and land. He remained in this class until he could take off and land a machine perfectly but must have had 14 hours total flying before leaving this class, and a minimum of 28 solo landings.

3. Spirals: Must have completed satisfactory spiral, hairpin turn and landing for a mark.

In this class particular attention was paid to air work. The student was required to cut his motor over a predesignated point at a stated altitude and land on a mark. He was compelled to do this until he had satisfied his instructor that he could land on the "T" from any direction or altitude. The instructor also sought to strengthen the pupil's weak points in flying. The student was taught to kill off altitude by performing the "S" and, if an exceptionally good pilot, was taught how to sideslip to a landing. The Brevet Test included one descent in spiral from 500 meters with engine stopped.

4. Voyage: [Altogether] 25 hours flying and 50 solo landings.

Every student was required to make:

- a. Two cross-country flights, landing at destination. The standard French Brevet Test called for trips of 60 kilometers minimum, to destination and back, one or both to be made between sunrise and sunset; but the first voyage was usually made to a point 32 kilometers from 2nd AIC and the second to a point 54 kilometers away. Papers were carried by the student and signed by the officer in charge of the voyage station, and

recording barographs were carried in all voyages and altitude flights.

b. Two triangular flights to two previously designated points, landing being made at both, second trip in reverse direction from first. (The French brevet test provided that two triangles of 250 kilometers could be covered, each to be made within two days at the most, with the allowance of one supplementary landing in the course of one of them; also that one of these might be replaced by a straight line voyage of 150 kilometers without a stop).

c. Altitude test: this might be a flight of 1 ¼ hour at 2000 meters [6562 feet] height during one of the trips, or by two ascents, outside of voyages, to 2000 meters with obligation to remain there 10 minutes each time.

5. Ground Work:

As most students were ground school graduates, this work was often at a minimum. It consisted chiefly of general theory instruction on motors, cross-country flying, map-reading, etc., with a little private instruction on Le Rhone motors to those required to use them.⁶⁴

A week after arrival at Tours the mail arrived, which was always a good thing. Unfortunately, the weather had been poor: rain and wind prevented the students from going up.

Flying at altitude can be very cold in an open cockpit. Not only was the air temperature lower at altitude but the flyers were faced with the wind in their open cockpits. The men were issued warm leather clothing. However, heavy knitted socks and sweaters were always welcome, and many wrote home asking for knitted clothing as well as the staple: American cigarettes.⁶⁵

When whether permitted, the student pilots were awakened at 5:45 a.m. with breakfast at 6 a.m., and then they would fly until around 10 a.m. They would eat again at 11 a.m. after which they had time off until 2:00 p.m. when they would fly again. Between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. they could go to town if they wished. About 3 p.m. they had a

⁶⁴ Gorrell, *Series J.*, vol. 7, p. 14-16.

⁶⁵ Peck, *Letters*, p. 29.

light meal of coffee, bread, cheese and a bit of chocolate. They would then return to the field and fly until about 6 p.m. After that, they were on their own until morning. A dinner of good food was at 7 p.m. This schedule ran 7 days per week.⁶⁶

Life on the ground was relatively easy for the men. However, it was all work when in the air. They all knew that their performance in the air was absolutely critical for any hopes of moving on to an advanced flying school.

Two weeks into flight training the cadets could tell how well other flyers had done in the air by their attitudes in the evenings, when some men were cranky and short-tempered. Others, looked discouraged while some acted like kids on an outing.⁶⁷

In late October the bureaucracy of the Air Section of the Signal Corps was still tangled as the airmen had not been paid since August when they were paid for July. The result was that they were hard up for cash. The men wondered if they would be paid at the rate of \$33 per month or \$100 per month in that they were flyers. Another concern was that the food had deteriorated, with some airmen commenting that there was horsemeat and potatoes served with every meal.⁶⁸

Belief in superstition was somewhat common. It was with Allen Peck. He wrote his 15-year-old sister saying that he had been wearing her wristwatch in the air as he believed it brought him luck. It needed to be replaced but he was “fearful of flying without it.” He intended on returning the watch to her and asked that she “above all things” keep it running until he returned. He requested that she send him one of her old silk stockings that he would make into a hat to wear under his flying helmet, as he wanted something of hers to wear when he flew.⁶⁹

One wonders what his sister thought of these strange requests. A couple of weeks later he again mentioned the stocking request, writing that he “must” have it before he was sent to the Front.⁷⁰ Later Peck asked his sister to send him a black cat stuffed animal for him to mount on the front of his aircraft when he got to the Front. He wrote that many flyers carried them for luck, and he had seen elephants, lions,

⁶⁶ Peck, *Letters*, p. 27.

⁶⁷ Peck, *Letters*, p. 31.

⁶⁸ Peck, *Letters*, p. 30.

⁶⁹ Peck, *Letters*, p. 32, 40.

⁷⁰ Peck, *Letters*, p. 40.

chickens and other stuffed animals used in this way.⁷¹ The letter censors must have been entertained by the seemingly strange comments about good luck talismans.

The men were also concerned, very concerned, about the status of their commissions. Many felt they had been misled at the time of enlistment and later at Ground School at M.I.T. It came as a real blow when some of the men who went through the M.I.T. program, and some who performed poorly there, arrived at Tours as 1st Lieutenants. Hugh and the others, still privates, now had to stand at attention and salute them. These new officers were also censoring the mail and doing inspections. It was "bitter medicine to take."⁷² At least Hugh and his fellows were paid, and paid at the \$100 rate, in mid-November which helped morale a bit.

However, the unfortunate commission situation apparently happened far too frequently among those who were separated in their training. The huge training organization was not a well-oiled machine, resulting in trainees who were held back due to poor performance often receiving their commissions before their more qualified brethren.

As November ground on, it was cold on the ground but bitter cold when flying. Sometimes a man would return to the ground with ice in his mustache.⁷³ Heavy socks and sweaters were an absolute necessity.

Now the critical period of training was upon them, and the stress level increased among the men. A day or two of poor flying would be a cause of great concern and made the next few days of flying vitally important.

In the scramble and chaos of flight training, much had to do with the ability of the student pilot to absorb the concept material on the ground and put those concepts into practice in the air. Mechanical aptitude, flying ability, weather, the skills of the instructor, examinations on the ground and the air, as well as luck, all played a part in when, or even whether, a student pilot was given his wings.

The men were overjoyed and excited to learn of the Battle of Cambrai, in Belgium, which began on November 20th with a surprise attack by 400 British tanks.⁷⁴ The tanks did well clearing deep barbed-

⁷¹ Peck, *Letters*, p. 46-47.

⁷² Peck, *Letters*, p. 42.

⁷³ Peck, *Letters*, p. 40.

⁷⁴ Peck, *Letters*, p. 49.

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wire obstacles and making some advances. Perhaps the cadet airmen looked favorably upon the tanks as a relatively new weapon of war, as were aircraft. In any case, the Germans counter-attacked and drove the British back.

On Sunday, December 2, Allen Peck suffered his first crash and “completely demolished a machine.”⁷⁵ The next day, December 3,

1917, at Tours, for whatever reasons, Hugh Thompson received the coveted French Brevet, his French pilot license, number 10242.^{76,77}

How joyful that day must have been. Hugh was then sent to the Advanced Flight Training facility at Issoudun, the 3rd Aviation Instruction Center.



Figure 5. Hugh in front of a Caudron, in which he likely soloed. Author's collection.

⁷⁵ Peck, *Letters*, p. 51. Peck eventually did get his wings and flew at the front for five months until the end of the war. He received the Croix de Guerre.

⁷⁶ There is an extant photo of Hugh standing next to a Caudron G-3 aircraft (see Figure 5). It is likely he had just soloed. These aircraft were used as primary trainers at this time at Tours [2nd A.I.C.] but not at Issoudun (Cameron, *Training to Fly*, p. 154).

⁷⁷ French Military Pilots Certificate Register.

CHAPTER 8

ADVANCED FLIGHT TRAINING – ISSOUDUN - 3RD A.I.C.

After graduating from primary flight training at Tours, Hugh was assigned once again to Issoudun and the 3rd Aviation Instruction Center, but this time for advanced flight training. He arrived the first week of December 1917. The main field was located six miles northwest of the town of Issoudun, 130 miles south of Paris.⁷⁸ Nothing remains of the airbase. It has returned to agricultural fields.

Eventually, Issoudun would become a huge facility with thirteen airfields. In November 1918, it would be the largest airbase in the world with 10,000 personnel assigned there. However, in the late fall of 1917, Issoudun was small, confused and at best a work in progress with a long way to go.

The rocky soil was a continual problem for aircraft, damaging landing gear and tailskids. Mud thrown from the wheels on takeoff or landing could, and frequently did, break the wooden propellers. Between April 1 and October 1, the weather allowed an average of twenty-five flying days per month. However, in the fall and winter, rain cut flying days to about fifteen per month.⁷⁹

There was little flying being done with only a handful of aircraft, or “ships” as they were often called in WWI, available. However, hundreds of cadets who had gone through ground school in the United States were there and more were arriving for primary flight training. These men had overwhelmed the stateside training facilities with their sheer numbers, and now they overwhelmed the training bases in France, including Issoudun. In addition, there were those, like Hugh, who had completed their primary flight training and were pilots awaiting their advanced training.

The cadets, many honor graduates, were eager to fly. However, their hopes and ambitions were shattered by the reality of the situation.

⁷⁸ 46° 59'50" N, 001°52'27" E.

⁷⁹ Gorrell, Series J., Vol. 9, p. 8.

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There simply were not enough qualified instructors, aircraft, or facilities of every kind. Morale plummeted and discouragement reigned. *Gorrell's History*, written in 1919, commented "to posterity the plight of these men may appear as one of the mild fortunes of war, but according to the standards of those days it was pathetic. ...each eager for flight, ready for its consequences, hoping for the crowning fortune of service in the air – and they were assigned to dig ditches, peel potatoes and stew beans."⁸⁰ Pilot Lt. Lucien Thayer, who was shot down and became a prisoner of war, when asked about his treatment while a captive, replied that it was "a damn sight better than I got in France as a cadet."⁸¹

Eddie Rickenbacker, before he learned to fly, was an engineering officer at Issoudun in the fall of 1917. He seemingly enjoyed adding to the demoralization of the cadets writing, they were

...young men of good family, recruited from Ivy League universities. Faultlessly attired in shiny Sam Browne belts, handmade boots and tailor-made uniforms, they came in expecting to find a flying school in full operation. Instead they found a mudhole and a tough Swiss-German engineer [himself] with a grammar-school education and the grubbiest of chores for them to perform. They made sarcastic remarks both behind my back and to my face, and I admit that I had some desire to get even. The muddy field was strewn with rocks, which would fly up and break the wooden propellers. I was running out of props [propellers]. One day I requisitioned a hundred buckets, put them in the hands of a hundred Ivy Leaguers and sent them out in the mud to pick up rocks. The groaning and moaning that day were music to my ears.⁸²

The cadets at the base were fortunate if they had barracks. Many lived in tents. Some slept in empty hangars. During the day they did everything from Military Police, carpentry, road building, common laboring in construction of the base, cooking, kitchen police (KP) and

⁸⁰ Gorrell, Series J., Vol. 9, p. 15.

⁸¹ Cameron, *Training to Fly*, p. 153.

⁸² Rickenbacker, Edward V., *Rickenbacker*, [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967] p. 112.

sentry duty. They were known as the “Million Dollar Guard” as they were being paid at the \$100 a month rate of a flying cadet despite the fact that they were receiving no flight training at all.⁸³

Fortunately, Hugh escaped being trapped in the morass in which the cadets wallowed when he had been ordered to Tours in early October for primary flight training. Now, he was a pilot needing advanced training. Those men with flying experience requiring advanced instruction were given preference over cadets in primary flight classes. Hugh would be able to take advanced training when the weather, available aircraft, and available instructors allowed.

Issoudun was intended for advanced pursuit⁸⁴ (fighter) training. The pursuit course was forty hours flying. Aerial gunnery training was given afterwards at a base at Cazaux, France.⁸⁵

However, many students were there, not for advanced training, but for primary training. Because of the plethora of students' needing primary training, there was a shortage of suitable dual control aircraft and qualified instructors. Issoudun graduates were often assigned, not to line squadrons, but retained at Issoudun as instructors. The undesirable, and unsafe, situation of an instructor teaching what had been learned only a few weeks before was common.

A difficulty arose for the advanced students as they had taken their primary flight training on a variety of different aircraft. At Issoudun the advanced students were faced with rotary engine machines that, in most cases, were very different from what they had learned to fly. The coursework was variable due to the various preliminary flying experiences of the students.

At Issoudun the weather was cold and wet. To Charles Codman, Issoudun was awful, cold and muddy. Codman's recollection of Issoudun was of standing on cold dark mornings for cold, barely edible food, worn-out flying equipment, guard duty, and latrine digging. Flying was a dangerous business; learning to fly was more so. During periods of reasonable weather, they flew, sometimes.⁸⁶

Charles R. Codman became a friend of Hugh Thompson and would become a pilot in the 96th Aero Squadron. He was born in Boston on February 22, 1893, educated at Groton School, and

⁸³ Cameron, *Training to Fly*, p. 152.

⁸⁴ During WWI the equivalent of a fighter aircraft in modern terms was called a scout, pursuit or chasse (French: hunt) aircraft.

⁸⁵ Gorrell, Series J., vol. 9, p. 16.

⁸⁶ Codman, Charles, *Contact*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937) p. 5.



Figure 6. Charles Codman, picture courtesy of Library of Congress

graduated from Harvard in 1915. In 1915 he served a year with the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia. For nine months he served in France with the American Field Service. He enlisted in April 1917, passed through ground school at M.I.T. and the primary flying school at Essington, Pennsylvania, receiving his commission as 1st Lieutenant on October 31, 1917. November 2, 1917 found him aboard the troopship, *Kroonland*, the same ship that had carried HST Infantry across the Atlantic three weeks before. He was sent for advanced flight training to Issoudun, where he and Hugh suffered the unsatisfactory conditions and little training.⁸⁷

On a lighter note, Hugh wrote humorously at Christmastime from Issoudun to HST Infantry to say that he had mistakenly received a Christmas box meant for HST Infantry.⁸⁸ Such an occurrence brightened a dismal time for Hugh.

The turning point for Codman and others occurred during a period of despair when an officer landed a flight of Breguet bombers on the field at Issoudun. The Breguets looked far sturdier and more reliable than the Nieuports they had been flying during their advanced training.

The officer spoke enthusiastically about the new school of Precision Bombing at Clermont-Ferrand, the 7th Aviation Instruction Center, usually referred to as simply Clermont. According to the officer the food was better, as well as the treatment of the students. There was no latrine digging and little guard

⁸⁷ Ticknor, Caroline, *New England Aviators, 1914-1918*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919) p. 136.

⁸⁸ Thompson, Hugh S., *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*, p. 32.

duty. To those suffering at Issoudun the sales pitch for Precision Bombing was very effective.

At that time, in December 1917, Quentin Roosevelt, the son of former President Theodore Roosevelt, was a bright, and popular, officer in charge of the final stage of flight training at Issoudun.⁸⁹ He helped grease the transfer from Issoudun to Clermont for a small group of like-minded young men. In two weeks, the men escaped the mud of Issoudun and took the train to Paris on the way to Clermont.⁹⁰ Hugh almost certainly was one of those young men.

Codman, from his own description, enjoyed a good party. He and the men transitioning from Issoudun to Clermont met members of the Lafayette Escadrille at a bar in Paris. Among the hospitable partiers was Cole Porter,⁹¹ the American songwriter and composer who was attached to an artillery school at Fontainebleau. After the bar they went to dinner. After dinner they went to Cole Porter's apartment where he, and they, sang. Late in the evening, Porter returned to Fontainebleau. While some men went to bed, others had a late supper, enjoying fresh food and more drinking before finally collapsing in bed.⁹² It would be nice to think of Hugh on this carouse after enduring Tours and Issoudun.

⁸⁹ Roosevelt, Kermit, editor, *Quentin Roosevelt, A Sketch With Letters*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921).

⁹⁰ Codman, *Contact*, p. 6. Thompson, Hugh S., *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*, p. 32, 39.

⁹¹ Cole Porter, 1891-1964.

⁹² Codman, *Contact*, p. 7-8.

CHAPTER 9

ADVANCED FLIGHT AND BOMBING TRAINING AT CLERMONT-FERRAND

Hugh, Charles Codman and the others from Issoudun arrived at Clermont in early February 1918. It would be their home for three and a half months. Instead of becoming pursuit (fighter) pilots, their focus now would be on bombardment.

The 7th Aviation Instruction Center (7th A.I.C.) at Clermont was the home of the American Day Bombardment School. It was located less than a mile south of the village of Aulnat, three miles east of the town of Clermont and 210 miles south of Paris.⁹³ The site is now the regional airport. Nothing remains of the WWI facilities.

The airfield was officially taken over by the Americans on November 15, 1917. It had been the testing grounds for the Michelin Company, who manufactured, among other things, the Breguet-Renault aircraft that were to be used not only by the bombardment school but also operationally by the American Air Service. The Michelin plant was located nearby at Clermont.

Prior to the Americans, the French had a small bombardment school on the field that they shared with Michelin. A month or so before the Americans arrived the French left. Michelin maintained equipment and a small team of technicians operating out of a couple of hangars.

The facility included a sizeable headquarters building, twelve one-story stucco barracks, nine seventy-two-foot by ninety-two-foot portable Bessonneau hangars made of wood and canvas, various sheds, and old wooden hangars that were utilized as classrooms.⁹⁴

The flying field was 1½ miles long and one mile wide. Due to its size the field could support twenty-five aircraft in the air at any one time. To the south, east, and west were mountains, and to the immediate north lay the village of Aulnat allowing few nearby landing

⁹³ 45°47'05.37" N, 3°10'09.36" E.

⁹⁴ Thomas, Gerald C., Jr., *The First Team: Thornton D. Hooper and America's First Bombing Squadrons*, Dallas: The League of World War I Aviation Historians, p. 15.

sites. Northward, beyond Aulnat, were landing areas that were used to accommodate cross-country flying, which was necessary for the bombing course.⁹⁵

The field itself was in a low and poorly drained area which, combined with its bumpy and rutted nature, made the field poor for aviation. During wet weather, flying was sometimes curtailed due to the condition of the field. However, the 7th A.I.C. achieved more flying hours per aircraft per month than did Issoudun, not including Sundays, which were not used for flying.⁹⁶

Life at the new bombardment school was pleasant. It was in a beautiful area and the city was friendly to the student flyers. An unusual feature was a large munition works nearby, Les Gravanches, where the workers, both men and women, acquired a deep orange color to their skin from the picric and sulfuric acid. The flyers were warned never to fly over or near Les Gravanches for fear of an explosion should an aircraft crash there.⁹⁷

Codman wrote that he enjoyed the school, the flying, and the mountainous scenery. The coursework was tough, but the result was worth the effort. They learned map-reading, detailed instruction on the bombsights, and bombing, as well as gunnery and formation flying. When not working, the men could do as they pleased.⁹⁸

The nightlife at Clermont, according to Codman, was mainly connected with the Cafe de la Regence, which was, for reasons not mentioned, officially out of bounds for both the French and American military. The place was operated like a speak-easy complete with secret passwords and a peephole in the door. Inside was a cafe with music and dancing.⁹⁹ It seems likely that Hugh enjoyed this local nightclub and demonstrated his dancing abilities.

The first class of twenty-three bombing teams began on February 20th. However, not all instructors had completed their own training. Therefore, four of them teamed up and joined the class as students. Such was the lack of in-depth knowledge and experience of the instructors assigned to teach the art of daylight bombing.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p. 209.

⁹⁶ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p. 209.

⁹⁷ Codman, *Contact*, p. 8.

⁹⁸ Codman, *Contact*, p. 8-9.

⁹⁹ Codman, *Contact*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, *The First Team*, p. 21.

Coursework

As a day bombardment school, training was specialized for the two men who manned the aircraft. The pilot was seated in the front cockpit while the observer (sometimes called the “bomber”) sat in the rear cockpit. The pilot flew the airplane. The observer dropped the bombs and manned the twin machine guns providing defensive fire for the airplane.

The 7th Aviation Instruction Center coursework was, in theory, to require four weeks to complete. However, since the school was just getting organized, six weeks were needed for four of the first five classes.¹⁰¹ The pilots and observers at Clermont were not assigned to any particular squadron. They were going through various classes learning their trade and would be ordered to a squadron after graduation.

The first necessity of the school was for the men to pair off into pilot/observer teams of their own choosing. They chose each other based on compatibility, as their effectiveness in bombing and their ability to communicate over the engine, wind, and gunfire noise was essential. They would bond together to the point that each knew almost instinctively what the other needed and when it was needed. For example, when attacked by enemy aircraft, the observer may need the pilot to raise or lower a wing, or kick the tail aside, to expose an enemy covered by a portion of their own aircraft to enable the observer to fire. On the ground the teams ate, slept and spent their free time together to enhance their abilities to act together.

Hugh Thompson and Charles “Pat” Anderson teamed up and would remain together, as it turned out, for the duration. After training, the teams would be sent to the front together.¹⁰²



Figure 7. Charles "Pat" Anderson

¹⁰¹ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p. 221.

¹⁰² Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p. 221.

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The son of a Bishop, Charles Patrick “Pat” Anderson was born fourteen months after Hugh, on April 20, 1896, in Oak Park, Illinois. He went to the University of Illinois for two years and then transferred to Dartmouth, class of 1918. He dropped out of Dartmouth and joined the American Field Service, as a truck driver, on May 5, 1917, after having been rejected for pilot training. In October 1917 he transferred to the Air Section.

Anderson was a quiet outdoorsman happier in the mountains and woods than in a city, society or theaters. He loved and was loved by animals. A horseman, hunter, and fisherman, he enjoyed solitude and the depths of forests as well as mountaintops.¹⁰³

Hugh and Anderson would become friends as well as a bombing team. Anderson was pilot and Hugh, despite being a qualified pilot, opted for the position of the observer or “bomber.”

According to Charles Codman, Anderson had the gift of second sight, writing “there were a number of us who *knew* that he could see things ahead.”¹⁰⁴ While he did not make predictions frequently, his strange ability must have been disturbing to many of the flyers who heard them.

When pondering his situation in the war, Anderson wrote to his father, “Take off your hat to the men in the trenches.” Separately, he wrote, “God is in the air as well as on the ground” and “War is war, and all any of us can do is to trust in God and go to it.”¹⁰⁵

The syllabus of the course of instruction included both ground and flying instruction with about twenty-two hours in the air and an equal number of hours on the ground:¹⁰⁶

Pilots:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. Transformation flying on service types, Breguet 14 B2 | 1 hour |
| 2. Camera obscura ¹⁰⁷ with instructor and own bomber until proficient | 2 hours |
| 3. Bomb dropping with own bomber (including | 2 hours |

¹⁰³ Seymour, James W.D., *Memorial Volume of the American Field Service in France*, Boston: American Field Service, 1921, p. 154-156.

¹⁰⁴ Codman, *Contact*, p. 76-77.

¹⁰⁵ Seymour, p. 154-156.

¹⁰⁶ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p. 225-226.

¹⁰⁷ The camera obscura was a training device for pilots and observers. It was used to teach both precision piloting and bombing.

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formation work)	
4. Formation flying and simulated raids when attacked by scouts ¹⁰⁸ (including camera, gun and bombing)	9 hours
5. Cross-country by map and navigation, men laying out own courses with own maps and sketches and making notes on fake bombardment	5 hours
6. Gunnery, ground and aerial (including formation work)	<u>3 hours</u>
Total	22 hours

Bombers (observers):

1. Rolling Carpet with Michelin Sights	1 hour
2. Camera obscura with instructor and own pilot until proficient, on Michelin Sight	2 hours
3. Bomb dropping with own pilot and Michelin Sight (including formation work)	2 hours
4. Formation flying with own pilot, bombers carrying camera guns and shooting at attacking scouts	9 hours
5. Cross-country by map and navigation, and study of sectors probably to be occupied so as to know landmarks by heart	5 hours
6. Gunnery, ground and aerial, complete	<u>3 hours</u>
Total	22 hours

In addition, lectures were given to both pilots and bombers:

1. Bombing in general	1 hour
2. Trajectory and theory of sighting	1 hour
3. Different types of sights, basic principles	1 hour
4. Michelin Sight (old)	1 hour
5. 7 th A.I.C. Sight	1 hour
6. Formation flying	3 hours
7. Map study	3 hours
8. Navigation (compass, plotting courses)	5 hours
9. Bombs	2 hours
10. Bomb drop gears	2 hours
11. Gunnery (Lewis & Vickers and aerial camera)	4 hours
12. Bombing raids	3 hours

¹⁰⁸ A scout in WWI terms is the equivalent of a fighter aircraft in modern terms.

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13. Preparation for trips (personal hygiene, etc.)	1 hour
14. Motors and planes	2 hours
15. Bombing objectives	2 hours
16. Errors and causes	<u>1 hour</u>
Total	33 hours

The “camera obscura” listed above was a teaching device consisting of a small darkened tent or room where the image of an aircraft could be projected onto a table by way of a lens. The student could follow the movements of the image and calculate its speed and course. This would be an aid in learning the art of precision aerial bombing.

The “rolling carpet” listed above was another ingenious training device. It was a wooden box positioned above a realistic terrain map fixed onto a moving treadmill. The view from inside the box allowed the student to learn to use the bombsight as he viewed the passing landscape below, much as if he were in an aircraft at bombing altitude. It could be considered a primitive simulator.

The methods used to teach the pilots and observers were developed from the French and British who had several years’ experience in bombing. The Americans, of course, were completely new to this type of aerial warfare. The training focused on the need for precision bombing in actual operations. The observers, in the early months when Hugh was at Clermont, were sent to the French school at Cazaux, 210 miles southwest of Clermont, in the foothills of the Pyrenes Mountains for their aerial gunnery training. Later classes were trained in gunnery at Clermont.¹⁰⁹

The pilot and observer teams practiced together in the air on every day suitable for flying. Due to the weather, most flying was done in the early morning and late afternoon when the air was calmest.¹¹⁰ Bombing instruction in rough air was incompatible with precision bombing.

When practicing bombing, as on an actual bombing mission, the pilot would have leads, much like reins, attached to his shoulders. The pilot could not see the target as it would be below the nose of the aircraft. The observer seated behind the pilot, looking through a window in the floor, would guide the pilot over the target by pulling

¹⁰⁹ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 4, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Thomas, *The First Team*, p. 21.

on the leads attached to the pilot's shoulders thus directing the pilot to steer left or right. Looking through his bombsight, the observer would determine when he should release his bomb load.¹¹¹

There were three purposes of day bombardment. Destruction of enemy materiel, reconnaissance and observation of enemy tactics in combat. Rarely, except in a ground offensive, was it possible to attack massed troops. The chief bombardment target was transportation lines that were delivering supplies and personnel to the front. Railroad centers were ideal. The railroad yards at Conflans-en-Jarnisy, or Conflans as it was always called, were hit again and again as it was a very large target that could be attacked with some certainty. Once railroad traffic was interrupted, traffic would back up at places such as the railroad yard at Dommery-Baroncourt, which could then be hit and cause further damage and delays.

The school required all instructors to have experience at the Front. These instructors, many of whom had just completed the course themselves, were sent to the Front for at least one flight across the lines with a French or British bombardment squadron. One operational flight across the lines was not much, but it gave the instructors at least a small taste of real operations. It also, hopefully, gave the students a bit more confidence in their instructors and in their own training. Later, after Hugh had passed through the training program, the school obtained instructors who had long service experience at the Front.¹¹²

Codman described a tragic accident towards the end of his time at Clermont. On May 10th, 1st Lt. A. R. Metzger and his observer 1st Lt. P. Robertson, one of the developers of the 7th AIC bombsight, attempted a chandelle, a maneuver involving a climbing 180-degree turn, immediately after take-off. The ship stalled, crashed and burst into flames. The witnesses could do nothing but helplessly watch the roaring fire that cremated both men. The following day the burial at the nearby Chateau de Mirabel at Riom was marred by the smell of burnt flesh seeping from the coffins. Thornton Hooper, soon to be a pilot in the 96th Aero Squadron, and eleven other instructors acted as pallbearers. During its ten months of existence, there were only three

¹¹¹ Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 159.

¹¹² Gorrell, Series J, vol. 4, p. 1.

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fatal accidents at Clermont.¹¹³

Hugh and his pilot teammate Pat Anderson graduated from the school on March 23, 1918.¹¹⁴ As far as they were concerned, they were ready to be sent to an operational squadron at the Front. But “confusion reigned” as the official history declared. While awaiting further orders Hugh was assigned as an instructor at Clermont.¹¹⁵ This assignment would allow Hugh to participate in at least one bombing mission over the lines before being assigned to an operational squadron.

¹¹³ Codman, *Contact*, p. 12.; Gorrell, Series J., vol. 7, p. 219. Thomas, *The First Team*, p. 26.

¹¹⁴ Thomas, *The First Team*, p. 24.

¹¹⁵ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p. 215. Unknown, undated, Nashville, TN newspaper clipping “Lieut. Hugh S. Thompson, Daring Aviator, Killed,” mentions his service as an instructor after completing training. Thomas, *The First Team*, p. 25. Hugh S. Thompson was a “later addition to the instructor staff.”

CHAPTER 10

AFTER GRADUATION: THE 96TH AERO SQUADRON

The Spring of 1918 was a critical period in the war. In early March the Russians surrendered. This allowed the Germans to transfer huge numbers of troops and equipment from the Eastern Front to the Western Front. The Germans knew that their best strategy, perhaps their only strategy, would be to knock the British, and, if possible, the French out of the war before the massive American buildup strengthened the Allies to the point where the Germans would face inevitable defeat.

On March 21st the Germans began a great Spring offensive crashing through a gap between the British and French armies. The British and French were taking heavy casualties and demanding that General Pershing commit the newly arrived, and only partially trained, divisions of American infantry to battle. Pershing ordered the American infantry to the Front under French command. He also ordered that only infantrymen be shipped to France, leaving their artillery and service units behind. Air Service personnel were not to be transported from the States from April through July. The war in the air must be fought with the airmen already in France.¹¹⁶

In early April 1918, the British were pushed back by massive German attacks. As the American ground troops were sent to the Front to relieve French units they began to take casualties. The war was becoming a reality for the Americans at home and in France.

Major Harry M. Brown arrived at Clermont on April 17th to take command of the 96th Aero Squadron. Captain George C. Thomas became the Adjutant.¹¹⁷ Brown, who was to become infamous three months later, graduated 91st out of 107 in his 1914 West Point class. His West Point classmates included future Army Air Forces generals Carl Spaatz, Ralph Royce and William Ord Ryan.

Brown learned to fly in the fall of 1916 at the Aviation School at

¹¹⁶ Thomas, *The First Team*, p. 24.

¹¹⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 2.

Rockwell Field (North Island), San Diego. He arrived in France with the 1st Aero Squadron in September 1917. In late January 1918, he assumed command of the 12th Observation Squadron. He preferred bombers and managed a transfer to the command of the 96th Squadron. He was twenty-seven years old, nearing old age for pilots.¹¹⁸ However, squadron commanders did not often fly in combat; so his age was not really a concern for anyone other than himself.

News reached the men waiting at Clermont that the German Ace Manfred “Red Baron” von Richthofen had been shot down on April 21st. He had been credited with eighty victories and was feared, as well as respected, by the Allied airmen.

The Wait for the Pilots and Observers

Uncertainty and rumor were still disturbing the men at Clermont as they awaited orders to join an active bombing squadron. Now officially trained, Hugh and Pat Anderson and other teams were eagerly waiting. And waiting. Boredom and frustration reigned; morale was low.¹¹⁹ There were no aircraft available. Weeks passed until the men, pawing the ground and chomping at the bit, were referred to by their comrades as the “bewilderment squadron.”

The scene at the Cafe de la Regence was one of repeated farewell parties as the expected departure date kept being pushed back. At first the mood was exciting and exhilarating, then became somewhat shop-worn from repetition as the delays stretched seemingly endlessly.¹²⁰ However, their days were filled with activity and repeated last-minute preparations to depart. Flying days were spent practicing the all-important skill of formation flying. It was time to go, past time.

Finally, orders arrived. Excitement swept through the waiting men. On May 17th Hugh and eleven other airmen were assigned to the 96th Aero Squadron. The following day at 3 a.m. Major Brown and most of the ground crewmen of the 96th Aero Squadron left, by vehicle, for Amanty airdrome, 225 miles to the northeast, near Gondrecourt. That night a big dance was held at the field. Hugh danced with Army nurses while music provided by an artillery band

¹¹⁸ Ruffin, Steven A., “Major Harry Brown and his ‘Lost Flight’ of the 96th Aero Squadron,” *Over the Front*, vol. 19 no. 3, Fall 2004, p. 196-221.

¹¹⁹ Thomas, *The First Team*, p. 24.

¹²⁰ Codman, *Contact*, p. 17.

livened up the already festive mood of the airmen. The following day the French hosted an “Entente” reception for the flyers, who were now bursting with impatience and anticipation. Finally, finally, on May 21st the eagerly awaited telegram from Major Brown arrived. It was time to fly to their new base at the Front.¹²¹

Support Personnel and Mechanics

The 96th Aero Squadron had been formed on August 20, 1917 at Kelly Field, Texas without aircraft nor flying personnel. The squadron, under the command of Captain George C. Thomas and consisting entirely of support personnel, went through basic training at Kelly Field. On October 9th the squadron was ordered to the Aviation Concentration and Supply Depot at Mineola, N.Y. for duty overseas. On October 27th they sailed from New York’s pier 61 on R.M.S.S. *Adriatic* arriving at Liverpool on November 10th. They immediately were sent to the 7th Aviation Instruction Center at Clermont, arriving on November 16th.

At Clermont, they took charge of the hangars, armament and ground transportation. The mechanics learned the intricacies of the Breguet bomber and Renault engine at the nearby Michelin factory where the Breguet 14 B2, the aircraft of the 96th Aero Squadron, was built. Other mechanics from the squadron were instructed by men from the 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th and 37th squadrons collectively known as the 7th Aviation Instruction Detachment. The 96th Squadron men had extensively trained at Kelly Field, the Michelin factory at Clermont, at the Breguet factory at Versailles, and at the Renault engine factory at Paris.

The men of the 96th were, in the spring of 1918, thoroughly trained as practical aircraft mechanics.¹²² Their knowledge extended far beyond maintenance to include repair of battle damage as well as repairing crashed aircraft. Later, in the field, they would find that spare parts were rarely available. The mechanics made do with whatever they could scrounge despite what regulations may have deemed suitable. Pieces of wrecked aircraft, literally even bits of French farm machinery, found their way onto aircraft to keep them

¹²¹ Thomas, *The First Team*, p. 26.

¹²² Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 65.

flying.¹²³

These men spent months acquiring the knowledge that would be essential when the 96th came together as an operational bombing squadron.¹²⁴

The 96th Aero Squadron Moves to Amanty Airdrome

At long last the handful of very worn Breguets, which had seen hard use at the Front and later as trainers at Clermont, were to be flown to the Front by the 96th Aero Squadron. On the big day, Tuesday, May 22nd, ten Breguets, the entire bombing force of the U.S. Army Air Service, took off from Clermont for the last time and headed north to join Major Brown and ultimately to face the enemy. Amanty airdrome would be home until the final weeks of the war.



Figure 8. Leaving Clermont for Amanty, May 22, 1918.

The men who were selected that day were teams of pilots and observers.¹²⁵

1st Lt. Cecil G. Sellers¹²⁶
 1st Lt. Thornton D. Hooper
 1st Lt. Andre H. Gundelach
 1st Lt. Thomas H. Farnsworth

1st Lt. Elisha E. Evans
 2nd Lt. Howard G. Rath
 2nd Lt. Pennington H. Way
 Cadet Robert E. Thompson

¹²³ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 2.

¹²⁴ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 1-2.

¹²⁵ Gorrell, series J, vol. 7, p. 216.

¹²⁶ Cecil "Swede" Sellers would lose his life January 11, 1938 in the crash of Pan American Airways Sikorsky S-42B, "Samoan Clipper," at Pago Pago, American Samoa. He was 1st Officer on that flight.

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1st Lt. Charles P. "Pat" Anderson
1st Lt. Durwood L. MacDonald
1st Lt. Joseph M. Mellen
1st Lt. Herbert D. Smith
1st Lt. Charles R. Codman
1st Lt. Robert G. Browning

1st Lt. Hugh S. Thompson
Cadet Alfred R. Strong
Cadet Rowan H. Tucker
Cadet George A. Ratterman
Cadet Virgil A. Hower
Cadet James E. Duke, Jr.

Six of those assigned were still cadets who were to become observers. A wise last-minute change in personnel assignment put six squadron mechanics in the rear seats of the aircraft originally slated to carry the cadets. The cadets were sent to Cazaux, in the far south of France, for additional gunnery training and would catch up with the squadron at Amanty later.¹²⁷



Figure 9. Twelve of those who flew to Amanty (L to R): Hooper, Mellen, H. Thompson, Anderson, Way, Gundelach, Codman, Sellers, Smith, Farnsworth, MacDonald, and Evans.

The flight stopped off for lunch at the French airdrome at Dijon where they found themselves among flyers with years of active service, much of it at the Front. The newcomers listened with great interest and excitement. The French pilots thought highly of daylight bombing saying it was more sporting than night bombing. However, they cautioned that it could be dangerous in an active sector where bombers might have to fight their way to the target and back again.¹²⁸ Fortunately, Amanty was in the quiet Toul sector.

The French cautioned that the enemy would attack in groups of

¹²⁷ Thomas, *The First Team*, p. 25.

¹²⁸ Codman, *Contact*, p. 19.

twelve to twenty or even more from all sides, including above and below. They said that the British, while brave, used poor tactics in that they flew bombing missions in small formations of eight or ten aircraft, which was not enough to defend themselves from a swarm of pursuit planes.¹²⁹

The American aircraft did not have their machine guns mounted as the guns were being transported by truck. The French pilots cautioned not to be blown off course and over the lines without their guns. They also said it was bad, very bad, to be captured with propaganda leaflets in the airplanes. After lunch, as the Americans continued the flight to Amanty, Codman noted that he had an odd feeling in the pit of his stomach. The war was getting closer with each passing mile.¹³⁰

After a few minutes in the air Codman began searching the ground for the town of Neufchateau, fifteen miles southeast of Amanty, a landmark on the route to Amanty. The leading aircraft, flown by Andre Gundelach,¹³¹ banked to the left and spiraled downward. Was it engine trouble? Codman followed him down over the thickly wooded terrain. He did not like the look of the immediate area as there was no good place to land other than a small field with woods on three sides. Perhaps in an emergency it would be alright but not on a regular basis.

In any event, the formation split up and followed Gundelach over the trees and onto the ground. It looked, to Codman, like an abandoned farm field with far too many rocks. There were no buildings in sight. The pilots and observers climbed down from their planes and wondered where they were and why they were there. Almost immediately the mystery was solved. They had arrived at their new base at Amanty. Codman had failed to identify the landmark town of Neufchateau that they had passed a few minutes before landing.¹³² After all of their efforts in the last year or more, they had arrived not just at Amanty ... they had arrived at the Front.

While there is no record of Hugh's thoughts immediately after his arrival at Amanty, it is not stretching the imagination to suggest that he may have contemplated that within a year he had made the leap

¹²⁹ Codman, *Contact*, p. 20.

¹³⁰ Codman, *Contact*, p. 21.

¹³¹ Codman, *Contact*, p. 22, the flight leader was Gundelach. Thomas, *First Team*, p. 26, the flight leader was Thornton Hooper.

¹³² Codman, *Contact*, p. 22.

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from the ancient and venerable profession of the cavalryman to the most up to date, even futuristic, position as an airman.

Fifteen years had not passed since the Wright Brothers flew at Kitty Hawk. It was just ten years since Wilbur Wright for the first time flew publicly, stunning the world with the evidence that the brothers had done the unthinkable ... they could fly with control. Even the now-famous photograph of the first flight at Kitty Hawk had not been made public until September 1908.

The former cavalryman, now a flyer, could take to the air and see below him the obsolete draft animals pulling wagons and artillery. And, he could see around him the clouds where he could roam as a modern man of the future.

CHAPTER 11

AMANTY AIRDROME

The Amanty airdrome was located a little less than a mile northwest of the tiny village of Amanty.¹³³ A road, now D168, ran through the airfield. Nothing remains of the Airdrome. It has reverted to farmland. Gondrecourt lies four miles to the West. Nancy is thirty miles to the Northeast. Paris is 150 miles to the West.

Of immediate importance to the flyers of the 96th Aero Squadron was that the enemy lines were twenty-five miles due North, five miles south of St. Mihiel, about 15 minutes away by air.

The St. Mihiel salient was a bulge in the lines sticking into the Allied line. It was created in 1914 by a German advance. The salient took the shape of a huge “V” with the point five miles south of St. Mihiel at the Meuse River (see Figure 10 on next page). The left arm went north passing about seven miles east of Verdun. The lines would go around Verdun and on to the west. The right arm of the “V” went from the point south of St. Mihiel east to Pont-a-Mousson on the Moselle River. In total the “V” covered about 50 miles of Front.

The primary targets of the 96th Squadron, mostly railroad yards, were in the wide opening of the “V.” The frequently attacked towns of Conflans-en-Jarnisy and Dommery-Baroncourt were among these. The Germans had built double and four-track railway systems connecting the major transportation hubs that carried enormous trains of men, supplies and war materiel. Disrupting that traffic was a critical part of the 96th mission.

The salient, or bulge, was useful when planning a raid. Depending upon the location of the target and the wind, the approach would be along the Allied side of one of the arms of the “V” crossing the lines to reach the target and then re-crossing the other arm to be over enemy territory the least amount of time. Being over enemy territory exposed the bombers to enemy anti-aircraft fire and also enemy pursuit planes.

The value of the salient to the Germans was that it protected the railroad center of Metz, north of Pont-a-Mousson on the Moselle

¹³³ 48°31'36"N 005°35'53"E

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River. The salient also blocked traffic on the main Paris to Nancy railroad as well as the Verdun to Toul railroad.

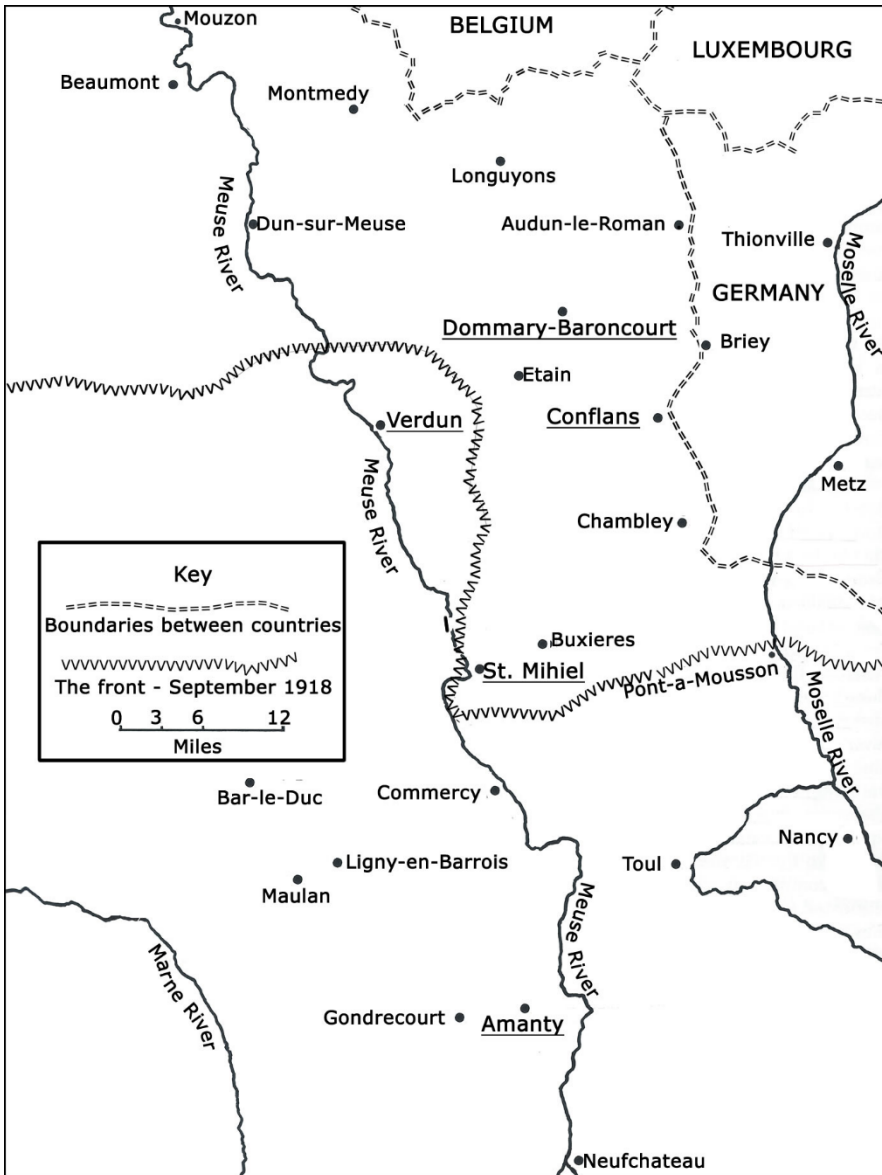


Figure 10. Map of Operational Area for the 96th Aero Squadron.

Amanty was in what was known as the Toul Sector. This area was, as the French pilots at Dijon had mentioned, not very active at the

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moment. The area was used by both the Germans and the Allies as a rest area as well as a training area for green troops. It was the ideal location for the new airmen to learn the skills required in daylight bombing. Enemy aircraft were few and not aggressive.

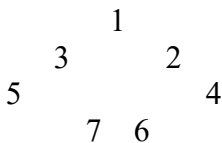
The squadron while technically operational would get its feet wet slowly. There was much to learn. A month before the ten teams from Clermont had flown to Amanty, a contingent of other teams had arrived at the airfield by truck. These men were now assigned to the 96th Squadron.¹³⁴

The pilots and observers would spend a great deal of their time in the air getting acquainted with the geography so that they could always find their way back to the airfield. Navigation was mostly accomplished by observing, and properly identifying, the geographic features that could be seen from the air: roads, railroads, rivers, and towns. Not becoming lost was, of course, vital.

Formation flying was also of great importance. While the men had learned to fly physically close together, aerial bombardment was new to the Americans. It was not clear just what sort of formation would be best for defense as well as for laying down an effective pattern of bombs.

The British and the French used different formations. Through experimentation with their Breguet 14 B2 aircraft, the Americans determined that the British formation was unsuitable due to the pilot's limited view of the ground forward and below, as it was obscured by the nose of the Breguet.

It was decided, at least tentatively, that the squadron would use the French formation.¹³⁵



Top View



Side View

This formation, with some variations including stepping up from the number 1 position rather than stepping down as seen from the side,

¹³⁴ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 3.

¹³⁵ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 3

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was used until near the end of the war when larger formations were used whenever possible due to increased enemy activity. Very regrettably engine problems, and props broken by flying mud on take-off, too often curtailed the size of formations actually capable of flying to the target.

The bombing formation was a constant topic of conversation as the squadron tried to figure out what formation would provide the best defense against attacking aircraft, as well as lay an effective pattern of bomb strikes on the ground. The formation would also have to be one where the pilots could easily see one another. It was a difficult problem that was never entirely solved.

However, in the long run the type of formation was not the critical factor in the safety of the formation. Of far more importance was to have as large a number of aircraft as possible, ten or fifteen at least, to provide adequate defensive firepower. The squadron would come to realize that flying a formation of four to eight aircraft simply could not defend itself effectively. Unfortunately, the squadron usually had less than ten aircraft to send on any mission. And, for various mechanical reasons, some aircraft would drop out and return to Amanty without crossing the lines, leaving an even smaller formation to potentially defend itself from enemy aircraft.

Among the bombing formations used were these:¹³⁶

```

      1
    3  2
  6  5  4
10  9  8  7
    12  11
  
```

```

      1
    3  2
  6  5  4
10  9  8  7
    12  11
  
```

```

      1
    3  2
  5    4
    7  6
  
```

As the squadron was new to bomber operations the bombing team of Lieutenants Cecil G. "Swede" Sellers and Elisha E. "Chick" Evans

¹³⁶ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 147, 149, 154.

was sent to the British 55th Squadron, I.A.F. on June 8th to observe their bombing operations. After they returned, they were replaced by Lieutenants Thornton D. ("Nap" or "Napoleon" to his friends) Hooper and Howard G. Rath, who spent June 19th through the 27th with the British. At the same time the commanding officer of the British 55th Squadron, Major A. Gray, spent ten days at Amanty as an informal advisor.¹³⁷ The 55th Squadron, along with two other British squadrons, had been operating since October 1917.

Regrettably, the visit of Hooper and Rath to the British was of very limited value to the men of the 96th squadron. No missions, or raids as they were often called, were flown on the first days due to heavy rain. The following days the British did fly but the weather was marginal and the Americans were left behind on the ground. Hooper and Rath could only hang around the hangars, talking to the mechanics and flyers while watching how an experienced day bombardment squadron operated on the ground. They were disappointed, however, in that they could not fly on missions. Returning to Amanty, they held a meeting on June 28th to pass along to their comrades what information they had obtained.¹³⁸

The 96th Squadron operated under the handicap of almost complete ignorance of how they should go about their task of effectively bombing the enemy. The United States had no bombing experience whatsoever, and there was no operational or procedural manual, either official, informal or unwritten, to act as a guide. Pilots Roger Clapp and Andre Gundelach were the only pilots with combat experience. Roger Clapp, although experienced, would not be with the squadron long enough to have a real effect on the learning process.

¹³⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 4. Gorrell does not mention the visit of Sellers and Evans and indicates that the second visit was by Sellers and Rath. Thomas, *First Team*, p. 33 and p. 38 lists the first visit as Sellers and Evans and the second as Hooper and Rath. As Hooper and Rath were a team, as was Sellers and Evans, likely Gorrell is in error.

¹³⁸ Thomas, *First Team*, p. 38, citing the diary of Howard Rath.

Flight Leader 1st Lt. Andre H. Gundelach

Andre H. Gundelach was born in Chicago on January 16, 1895. His father was a cabinet maker. At the age of 19, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy where he served as a boatswain's mate and made an around the world cruise. In late 1916 he asked for a discharge from the Navy so he could join French aviation.

Between March and July 1917 he attended French flight schools. In July, he was assigned to Escadrille SPA 95, a pursuit squadron, at the Front. While with SPA 95, he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre with Palm for shooting down a German aircraft.

In September, he was transferred, at his request, to Escadrille Sop. 111 which was a bombing squadron. He flew Breguet 14 B2 aircraft with the squadron until December 1917. His operational experience flying the Breguet would make him the senior combat flyer when he joined the 96th Squadron. He was transferred to the 7th Aviation Instruction Center at Clermont on January 3, 1918, where he served as an instructor. On May 17th he was assigned to the 96th Aero Squadron with the first group of pilots and observers, which included Hugh Thompson.

Charles Codman wrote that Gundelach handled a Breguet as if it were a pursuit plane, which inspired confidence among the other airmen.¹³⁹



Figure 11. Andre H. Gundelach.

The Life of the Airmen at Amanty

The airmen would have to learn on the job and figure out the best procedures on their own. Fortunately, the quiet Toul sector allowed them, for the most part, to do that. The pilots and observers would continually discuss ways of improving their performance in the air over the target and on the return. Everything was open to discussion including communication between pilot and observer, communication

¹³⁹ Gordon, Dennis, *The Lafayette Flying Corps: The American Volunteers in the French Air Service in World War One*, (Atglen, PA: 2000), p. 190-191.

between aircraft, flying formations, routes to and from targets, and bomb aiming techniques.

The airfield at Amanty was huge, despite Codman's initial impression. It had been leveled and rolled by an American construction squadron. Eighteen or twenty aircraft could assemble and take off in formation at the same time.¹⁴⁰

To prevent the airfield from being easily identified from the air by the enemy, every activity, except flying, was conducted within the woods along the perimeter of the field. Hangars, officers' quarters, enlisted men's quarters, and offices were camouflaged under the trees.

Four flying teams, eight men, lived in each hut. Pat Anderson and Hugh Thompson shared their hut with Charles Codman, his observer James O'Toole, and four others. In front of each hut was a wooden table where the men would play cards, read or just gather. The men cut their initials into the wood at their place at the table. Next to their names it was customary to carve a star for each mission they flew.

The 96th Squadron shared the airdrome with other squadrons. Having fourteen Bessonneau hangars¹⁴¹ and barracks sufficient for four squadrons, the facility at Amanty was kept busy. Squadrons rotated in and out over the course of the several months that the 96th squadron was there.

During their free time, the officers could visit Neufchateau in one of the squadron trucks, fifteen miles south, where there was a good Officers Club and a place where they could take a bath rather than the primitive shower at Amanty. Minor items could be purchased at Neufchateau but there was not much in the way of entertainment. At the field at Amanty there was a YMCA hut that provided essentials such as cigarettes, candy, and writing materials. The airdrome had a gramophone or two, volleyball and ping pong. Within walking distance of the field, there was a place that served duck soup that the flyers would eat while drinking wine, smoking endless cigarettes, and talking about life after the war.

The city of Toul, twenty miles away, and the choicest destination, Nancy, the Paris of Lorraine, thirty-five miles away, were the entertainment high spots. Unlike the reputation of some squadrons, wild nightlife was not readily available, at least not locally, to the

¹⁴⁰ Mauer, Mauer, *The U.S. Air Service in World War I*, vol. I, p. 357.

¹⁴¹ 72-foot by 92-foot.

96th.¹⁴² The exception was the occasional visit to Paris. There, nightlife could be found, at all hours, as raucous as the airmen desired. By his own admission, Codman said that his off hours in the early days at Amanty were essentially a reckless life, before he learned that War required payment in blood.¹⁴³

Naturally, one of the favorite pastimes of the flyers was to hang around the aircraft while they were being serviced. This was not supervision per se but rather personal interest. Each of the flyers had picked up enough knowledge in ground school, flying schools and in day to day contact with aircraft that they knew what was going on when aircraft were being repaired or maintained. There was also an intangible attraction to the smells of gasoline, oil and the nitrate dope¹⁴⁴ applied to the cotton fabric. In addition, no opportunity to engage in informal hangar flying could be passed up.

After the Engineering Department's arrival at Amanty, the irrepressible Major Brown ordered the department to have the aircraft ready for operations within two weeks.

Aircraft

The men of the 96th were to fly the Breguet 14 B2 bomber fitted with a 300 h.p. type 12 F.E.V. Renault engine powering a 9.5-foot propeller. This French plane was designed to be both a trainer and a bomber. It had flight controls in both the forward compartment and rear compartment. The observers were not taught to fly at Clermont. However, in July when the squadron was operational, the observers were taught the rudiments of flying as it became obvious that they might need to take control and fly a plane in which the pilot had been killed or wounded in combat. As Hugh was a pilot, he would not have required further training.

The Breguet 14 B2 entered service in the summer of 1917 and was considered a very sturdy, dependable machine. About 5,500 of them were built during WWI. The Breguet weighed 3,900 pounds and could carry 500 pounds of bombs. The top speed was 110 mph and it had a

¹⁴² Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 163.

¹⁴³ Codman, *Contact*, p. 51.

¹⁴⁴ Alexander, Ron, *Covering With Dope*,

<https://www.aircraftspruce.com/catalog/kitspages/copingvsrebuilding.php>
accessed, August 29, 2019. Ron Alexander was an expert vintage aircraft pilot and restorer.

service ceiling of 19,000 feet. It could climb to 6,500 feet in 7 minutes and reach 16,000 feet in thirty minutes. The usual operating altitude for bombing missions was 12,000 to 15,000 feet.

The frame was duraluminum, which was lightweight and very strong. In addition, the wheels and tail skid had shock absorbers allowing for harder landings without damage.¹⁴⁵

An unusual feature of the Breguet was the automatic flaps across the trailing edge of the lower wings. These flaps would depress downward when the velocity of the aircraft was low providing more lift, thus allowing for a 10-15 mph slower landing speed and a slower take-off speed. At normal flying speed the flaps would automatically raise. Thirteen Sandow¹⁴⁶ cords, much like bungee cords, on each lower wing supplied the energy to move the flaps.¹⁴⁷

A variant of the Breguet 14 B2 was the A2 known as the Corps d'Armee. It was designed as an observation aircraft and did not come from the factory equipped with bomb racks or bombsights. These had to be modified in the field. The A2 did not have the automatic wing flaps and never was altered to include them. During the 4 months of operations, the 96th squadron received thirty-one B2s and thirty-two A2s.¹⁴⁸

It should be kept in mind that these men flew their Breguets at altitudes up to 2.5 - 3 miles without the aid of oxygen. In the cold thin air above 10,000 feet, the mental faculties are affected by the lack of oxygen.

Armament

In early April 1918, work began at Clermont on arming the ten old Breguet aircraft that were to be transferred to the 96th squadron. There were no machine guns of the American 30-06 caliber available. Ten Vickers guns and twenty Lewis guns were found in .303 British caliber. The Lewis guns were procured from the Marine Corps and sent to the Peugeot factory in Paris to be remodeled for use in aircraft. The guns, along with ninety-nine Peugeot magazines, were packed

¹⁴⁵ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 74.

¹⁴⁶ Named for Eugen Sandow, strongman, 1867-1925.

¹⁴⁷ Toelle, Alan D., *Windsock Datafile Special, Breguet 14* (Berkhamsted, Herefordshire, Great Britain: Albatross Productions, LTS), 2003, p. 48.

¹⁴⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 77. Toelle, *Breguet 14*, p. 19.

and shipped with a 96th squadron armament sergeant acting as courier to the 7th Aviation Instruction Center. Captain Thomas paid for the transportation himself.¹⁴⁹

Once at the shop at Clermont the guns had to be test-fired and taken completely apart. Each contacting part was stoned down until its mirror-like surface would provide as friction-free action as possible. Operating in the frigid air at high altitude, the guns could not be lubricated, as oils would thicken in the cold and might cause a jam.¹⁵⁰

The Breguet 14 B2 aircraft was equipped with one forward-firing Vickers machine gun. The Vickers machine gun was operated by the pilot through the use of a flexible wire known as the Bowden control system. The pilot's control stick had a trigger that when pressed, through the Bowden control, activated the trigger on the machine gun, firing the weapon. A complex mechanical device that operated off the engine crankshaft interrupted the firing mechanism of the machine gun, allowing it to fire bullets past the spinning propeller blades without hitting them.

The standard .303 caliber Vickers recoil-operated machine gun was designed as a water-cooled ground combat weapon firing at the rate of 450 rounds per minute. Due to the nature of air combat, where targets might be in the sights for only an instant, an increased rate of fire was desirable. The Vickers was modified to fire up to 800 rounds per minute with the addition of a muzzle attachment that increased the weapon's recoil. The water-cooling apparatus was removed, and slits were cut into the gun's radiator to allow the fast-moving cold air at high altitude to enter and provide cooling. The spade grips were removed, and the gun was mounted on the left side of the fuselage. It was immobile, and so it could only be aimed by pointing the aircraft itself.¹⁵¹

The Vickers gun was fed by a belt-fed magazine, made at the Michelin factory, housed in a box within the fuselage. Spent bullet casings, as well as the disintegrating metal belt links, fell away from the plane through a chute. The weapon also featured a one-handed loading handle allowing the pilot to clear jams and load. When the

¹⁴⁹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 78.

¹⁵⁰ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 87.

¹⁵¹ *Handbook of Ordnance Data, November 15, 1918*. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1919, p. 249.

Vickers ceased firing, the breach block stopped in the open position so a loaded round would not rest in the hot chamber where it might fire spontaneously from the heat.

The Vickers gun was aimed using a 5-inch ring and bead front sight. The ring, with a one-inch center ring, was mounted 38 inches from the pilot's eye. The rear sight was a red bead mounted atop a 3-inch conical post conveniently in front of the pilot's face. The machine gun was mounted on the left side of the fuselage and not directly below the sights so that the sight and the machine gun would be harmonized at a pre-determined distance ahead, where the bullet from the gun and the view from the sight would converge together on the target.

When the target is coming from the side, the 5-inch ring comes into play:

When the target is crossing the line of sight, which is the line of flight, the outer ring is used as a basis of estimating the proper deflection, allowing for the course of the target and the flight of the bullets. The size of the ring and its distance from the eye is so fixed that the correct line of sight of an enemy plane, when flying at right angles to the line of sight at 110 miles per hour, will be found when the target is sighted at the outer circumference of the ring, flying toward the center, the bead centered on the small ring. These data are based on the use of American ammunition.¹⁵²

In short, due to the motion of the target airplane, the machine gun must "lead" the target. The ring front sight allowed the gunner to know when to fire even though the gun was not actually pointed, in a direct line-of-sight, at the moving target airplane.

The observer in the rear cockpit was armed with two .30-caliber Lewis machine guns. Initially, the standard ground version of the machine gun was modified for use in the air. Later, an aircraft version of the Lewis gun was developed. The gun's radiator and radiator casing were unnecessary and were removed since the low temperature at high altitude, the cooling effect of the wind, and the fact that in aircraft combat not more than 30 rounds are usually fired at one burst.

Rather than a buttstock the guns had spade grips. The two guns

¹⁵² *Handbook of Ordnance Data*, 1919, p. 257.

were mounted together on a yoke called a jumelage, which was then attached to the scarf ring (tourelle) that was two rings, one movable on the other, mounted so it encircled the observer's cockpit. The lower ring was attached to the fuselage. The upper ring turned on the lower ring. The rotary action of the tourelle, combined with a joint permitting the perpendicular action of the jumelage, made it possible to aim the guns in all directions, except directly rearward below the horizontal stabilizer or forward so the aircraft could not be hit by its own machine-gun fire.

Both guns were fired together using the Bowden control. The trigger end of the Bowden control was attached to the grip of the right-hand gun, with the other end fastened to the grip of the left-hand gun, the yoke resting on the trigger. The trigger on the right-hand gun could be pulled and at the same time the trigger of the Bowden control pressed, thus operating both guns. A recoil enhancer device was added to the Lewis guns to increase the rate of fire from 500 to 650 rounds per minute.¹⁵³

The observer would wear a heavy leather belt around his waist. Two straps connected the belt with the tourelle, allowing the observer to stand and turn with the tourelle. It also served as a safety belt during maneuvers of the plane.

The Lewis guns were fed by flat, circular magazines rather than belts as used in the pilot's Vickers gun. The Breguets used the 97-round flat magazines with five spare magazines carried in a rack in the observer's compartment. A round indicator was attached to the top of the magazine to indicate the number of rounds left in the magazine. A bag was attached below each gun's ejection port to catch spent cartridges so they would not impede the observer.¹⁵⁴

Lewis guns were equipped with the Norman wind vane sight manufactured at the machine shop at Clermont. The sight would only be on the right-hand Lewis gun as the observer would use the right gun for aiming. Both guns were harmonized to hit the same place on the target at a given distance.

The Norman wind vane sight:

is used in connection with the Lewis guns mounted in the tourelle to compensate for the deflections due to the movement of the target as well as that of the guns. The

¹⁵³ *Handbook of Ordnance Data*, 1919, p. 250, 254.

¹⁵⁴ *Handbook of Ordnance Data*, 1919 p. 257.

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2½ inch ring sight, mounted at 19 inches from the gunner's eye, provides for the motion of the target, and the wind vane provides for the deflection of the bullet due to the motion of the plane. The front sight mounted on the barrel or radiator 38 inches from the eye consists of a bead mounted on a stem. This stem is hinged by means of two arms to a rotating support and a vane. The rotating support is fitted into the socket of a fixed base which is attached to the gun. The motion of the plane brings the vane to the rear and the bead to the front, thus making an automatic adjustment for the deflection given the bullet by the lateral motion of the gun. The rear ring is used as is the ring of the 5 inch ring and bead sight, to allow for the flight of the target. The sight is adjusted for a speed of 110 miles per hour.

An aluminum base has been designed with four sockets for use on the Lewis gun. It is attached to the muzzle of the gun, and the four sockets serve as an adjustment for the speed of the plane. A slower speed will require the sight to be moved to the rear, thus shortening the angle of sight which compensates for the deflection of the bullet imparted by the slower moving plane. The rear socket is for a speed of 80 miles per hour, as used with the 110 miles per hour sight.¹⁵⁵

While not part of the aircraft armament, a Very Pistol was part of the equipment of each observer. This device was much like a 10-gauge single-shot shotgun configured like a short-barreled pistol. Its purpose was to shoot flares to signal other aircraft.

To operate the Very Pistol the barrel-catch is pressed with the thumb allowing the barrel to pivot downwards. A signal cartridge is inserted into the barrel; then the barrel is snapped closed. It is fired by pressing the trigger. The flare, or signal light, is of three types: red, green or white with 1, 2, 3 or 6 stars. It is very low powered, shooting the signal light projectile only far enough to clear the wings of the aircraft. The flare did not utilize a parachute and simply falls to the ground.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ *Handbook of Ordnance Data*, 1919, p. 257-8.

¹⁵⁶ *Handbook of Ordnance Data*, 1919, p. 289, 291.

Bombs

World War I was the training, engineering and development ground for all manner of new combat concepts and equipment. Aerial bombardment was an entirely new form of weaponry. Because the aircraft could not carry large bomb loads that would cover a wide area, it was necessary to hit the target directly or at least hit very close. To obtain the desired accuracy from a height of 10,000+ feet was a formidable difficulty.

The problems involved with aerial bombardment were immediately apparent, but the solutions were difficult and never adequately solved.¹⁵⁷ In simplest terms the difficulty was that a bomb dropped from an aircraft is moving, when released, at the same speed as the aircraft. However, the bomb is immediately affected by both gravity and aerodynamic drag of the bomb itself, which combine to cause the bomb to fall to earth and its forward speed to decrease.

In addition, a falling bomb is affected by winds. For true accuracy, the bombsight must indicate the proper direction of flight and the proper instant in time at which the bomb must be released from the plane for the bomb to hit the target. This was far from a realistic goal for WWI technology unless the target was sufficiently large.

The bombers of the 96th squadron were equipped with the Michelin Company's product called the "7th A.I.C. Bomb Sight" in recognition of the significant input into the design of the bombsight by the training facility at Clermont. It may have been the best bombsight of the war (see Figure 12).

This device, though a significant improvement over more primitive methods of sighting, was not really effective. The 7th *A.I.C. Bomb Sight* manual published in 1919 optimistically states that the bombsight allows "the bombardier [bombardier] to drop the bombs with precision."

¹⁵⁷ Bombing accuracy, even with the famed Norden bombsight of WWII, was not "precision" until the advent of smart bombs in the late 20th century.

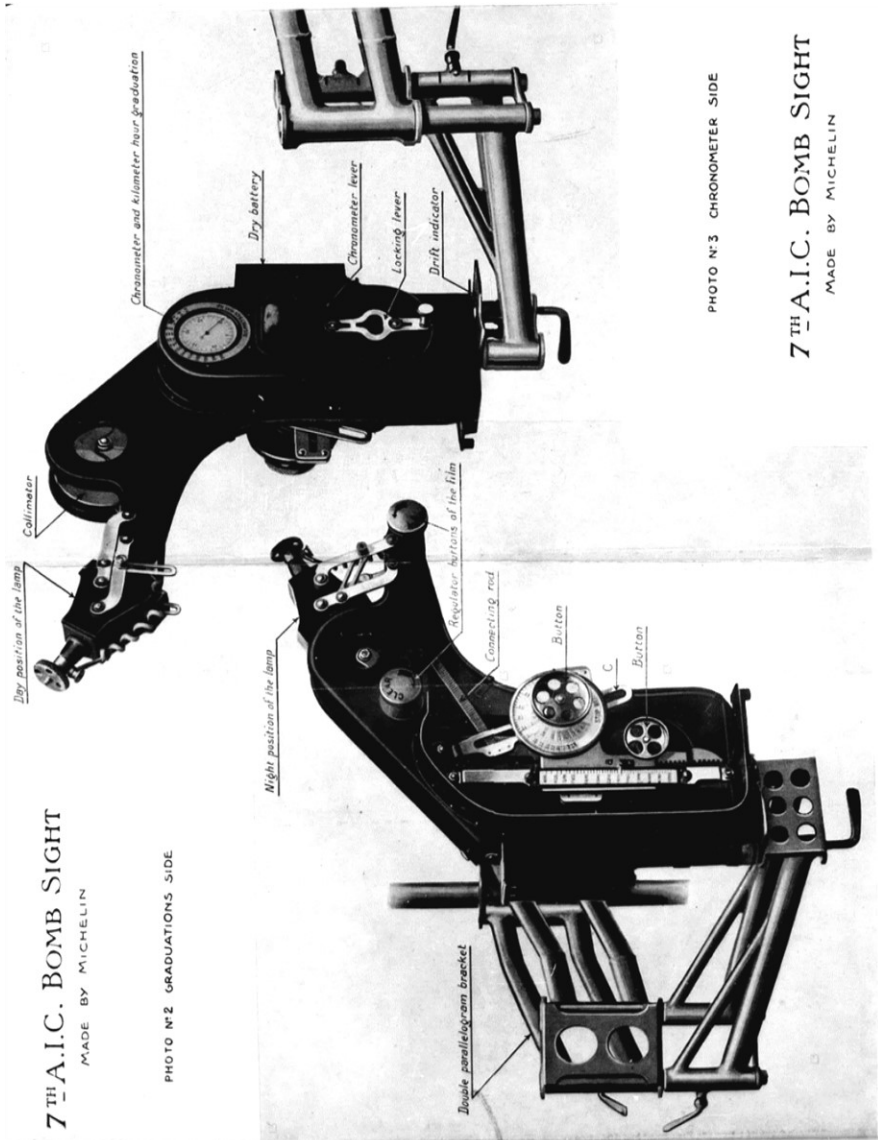


Figure 12. 7th A.I.C. Bomb Sight.

Confidently, the manual reassuringly describes its capability:
 ... [It] allows shooting [bomb dropping] by the method
 of the determination of the shooting angle [the angle of
 the straight line from the bombing aircraft directly to the
 target and the vertical line from the aircraft to the ground
 directly below] before starting, a method which is now

employed a great deal with a number of sights.

Being known:

The wind direction – its speed – the direction in which the objective should be attacked – the air speed of the machine and the bombing height.

Everything being known or pre-arranged before starting, it is easy to determine the corresponding shooting angle and to set up the sight on the ground.

Trajectories are determined by calculation for every projectile [bomb] and for every speed from data provided by the Eiffel Aerodynamic Laboratory.¹⁵⁸

However, the same variables that must be known were the weaknesses of the system. If the wind direction, wind speed, aircraft ground speed, ballistics of each particular bomb, and the bombing altitude were all known precisely, then the sight would be effective providing that the bombs could be released at the precise instant required. But each of these variables was almost impossible to determine accurately with WWI technology. Even if only one variable was incorrect the bomb may not hit the target. Thus, this bombsight was, as were all others at the time, woefully inadequate.

The 7th AIC bombsight had the great advantage of being swung on a pendulum so the observer would always sight through it directly at the ground regardless of the rolling or vibration of the aircraft. One problem with the sight was that it was very difficult to operate precisely when the observer was under high stress which, of course, was the nature of air combat.¹⁵⁹

Determining the altitude was critical and extremely uncertain as the altimeters, of the barometer type, were relatively crude. They were set on the ground before taking off to provide a known reference.

Bombs were loaded onto carriers, of various types, on the underside of the lower wings and released by several mechanisms. There were two types of carriers available for the Breguet. The 96th Squadron used one, or both, types. It must be remembered that the technology of every aspect of air bombardment was constantly

¹⁵⁸ Instruction manual, 7th A.I.C. Bomb Sight, made by Michelin & Co., 1919. Gorrell, Series J, vol. 4, Report on Day Bombardment Training in A.E.F., <https://www.fold3.com/image/19197050>.

¹⁵⁹ Gorrell, Series J, vol. 4, p. 4 and 9.

changing. Therefore, equipment and methods were evolving continually during the four months that the squadron was operational.

As described in the *Handbook of Ordnance Data*,

The Michelin, Type IV carrier was made in both a single and double type. The single type consists of a simple rack for either end of the bomb. Near each end is a pincer which serves to hold the bomb in suspension by means of buttons which are attached to it. When the bomb is mounted it is merely forced up into the pincers until they snap over the button. Release is made by means of a Bowden control device, which opens the pincers and allows the bomb to fall. The double carrier will take either two Michelin illuminating bombs, or two 115 mm. longs, or one 155 mm.

The Michelin Breguet, Type I carrier consists of a frame containing two rows of eight groups of pincers the same as those in the Type IV carrier. The frame is mounted as an integral part of the wings of the Breguet B2 plane, with one frame on each side of the fuselage. Release is controlled by a hydraulic system and pump, with a glycerin mixture as the liquid. It is used in connection with the Michelin bomb sight and is set in accordance with figures arrived at by means of that sight. Bombs are released singly, alternating on either side, to preserve the balance of the plane. This carrier takes the 90 mm, the 115 mm long, 155-bis, and, with special bands and buttons, the 155 mm bombs.¹⁶⁰

Bombs could be dropped from the airplane all at once or in a trail, to explode in a line parallel to the line of flight. When dropped in a trail, the bomb release mechanism would allow the bombs to drop from alternating sides of the aircraft to maintain trim. Railroad tracks were approached so the trail of bombs would be across the tracks rather than parallel to the tracks to increase the probability of getting a hit. The trail could be extended, as desired, to reach as much as a mile. A large target, such as the railroad yard at Conflans was so big

¹⁶⁰ *Handbook of Ordnance Data*, p. 281, 282.

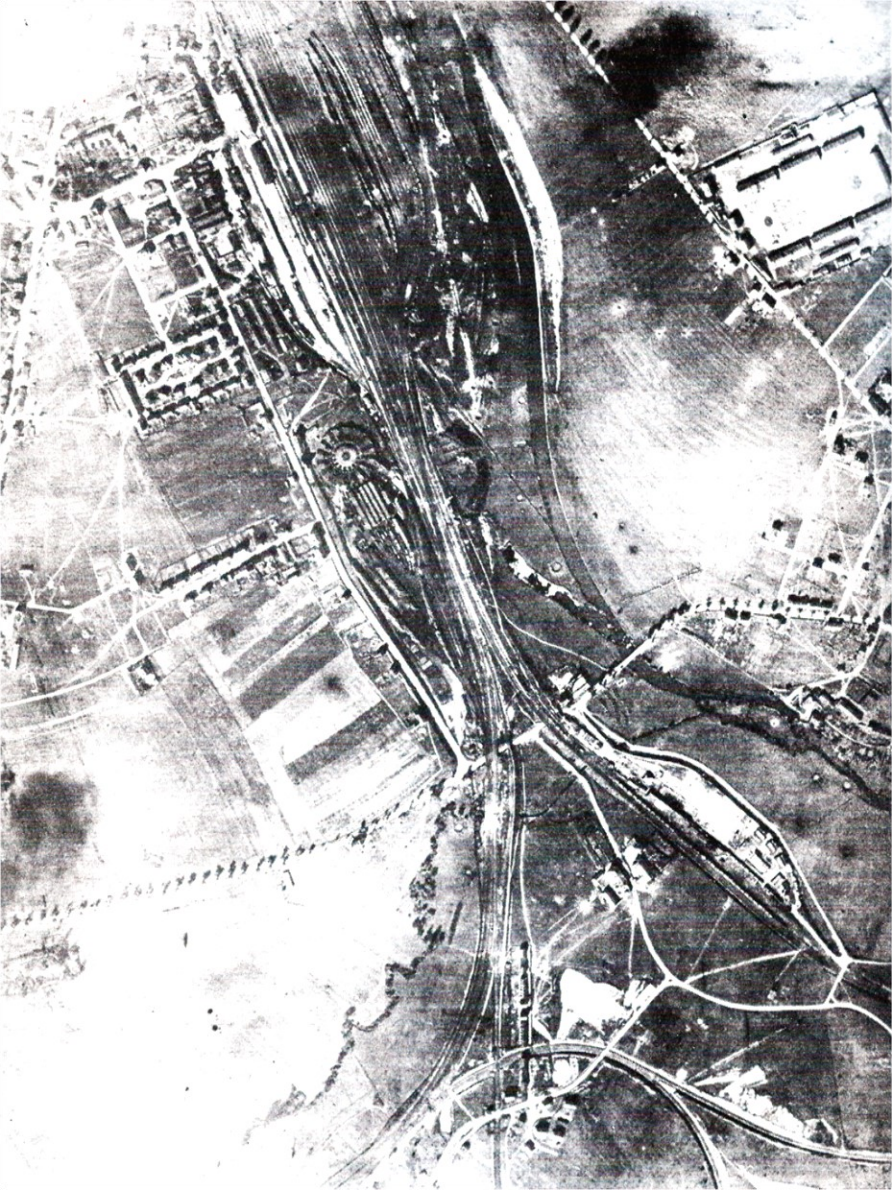


Figure 13. Conflans, with north to the right and south to the left

it could be attacked from any direction and precision was not essential.¹⁶¹ The yard at Conflans was roughly 250 yards north to south and 1100 yards east to west making it a significant geographical feature. Yet, it was often missed as will be seen.

¹⁶¹ Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 160.

Pilot David Young recalled that anti-personnel, incendiary, and heavy demolition bombs were sometimes loaded in the same bombload as they did not want to miss the opportunity of setting fires or causing casualties. He described the crater from a demolition bomb to be “about the size of the average room.” He also commented that sometimes within hours the Germans would have installed switches, and the railroad trains would be going around bombed sections of the railyards.¹⁶²

There were three types of bombs used in WWI. The high-capacity bombs had a large ratio of weight of explosive to weight of the bomb container. Most of the missions of the 96th carried these bombs as they worked well with railroad terminals and railroad lines or railroad marshalling yards, and buildings of all kinds.

Fragmentation bombs carried small charges of explosive in a heavy steel shell and depended upon the fragmentation of the shell to inflict casualties on unprotected personnel or draft animals.

Incendiary bombs were used for setting fire to ammunition dumps, buildings, airdromes, grain fields, etc.

It should be noted that the bombs required a powerful detonator to set them off. They would not explode if struck by rifle bullets. The machine guns of WWI aircraft fired .30-caliber rifle bullets unlike the .50-caliber and other more powerful weapons used in WWII. Therefore, they would not explode if hit by enemy fire.

All American bombs had a pin safety system that, when left in the bomb, allowed the bomb to be dropped and not explode should that be desired. In addition, an aircraft on an aborted mission could safely return to the airdrome with its bombload. The pin safety would be extracted just prior to dropping the bombs on a target.

A basic necessity for a bombing squadron was....bombs. However, the tangled supply bureaucracy could not get bombs from the depots to the 96th Squadron. Officers of the Armaments Department roamed the countryside in the squadron Cadillac visiting French supply depots seeking a transfer of bombs to the 96th Squadron.

At one French air park they found a supply of bombs. They returned to Amanty for a French-speaking officer to make the formal request to the French commander. Hugh Thompson returned with them to the supply depot but was unable to persuade the French to let him have any bombs. The squadron commander, Major Brown,

¹⁶² Leiser, “Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron,” p. 160.

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followed up with a personal visit and plea. The result was that on June 8th, 1000 115-mm short Michelin bombs were delivered from French Air Park No. 13 located back at Clermont.¹⁶³ These small anti-personnel bombs weighed only 8.1 kilos each, or 18 pounds, and were unsuitable for attacking railroad yards, but they were at least bombs. The 96th Aero Squadron was now ready to take the war to the enemy.

¹⁶³ It is not known if Hugh Thompson was fluent in French, had learned French in school or perhaps picked it up since arriving in France. For the attempt to obtain bombs see Thomas, *The First Team*, p. 35 and Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 79.

CHAPTER 12

THE FIRST U.S. BOMBING MISSION – JUNE 12, 1918

The first bombing mission ever conducted by the United States was carried out by the 96th Aero Squadron on the afternoon of June 12, 1918. The target was the railroad yards at Dommery-Baroncourt.

On the morning of the 12th, the squadron flew practice formations. In the afternoon the historic first mission was flown. British General Hugh “Boom” Trenchard, commanding the Independent Air Force¹⁶⁴ in France, a leading proponent of aerial bombardment, was present with his staff at the take-off. Representing the British 55th Squadron was Major A. Gray and Captain Ward. Either Colonel William “Billy” Mitchell, who visited Amanty several times, often flying in a two-seat Spad XVI with a French pilot and Mitchell as the observer,¹⁶⁵ or Brigadier General Benjamin D. Foulois, Chief of Air Service, American Expeditionary Forces, or both, may have been there. French dignitaries were also witnesses to the start of the historic mission.¹⁶⁶

There is some confusion in the record as to just how many aircraft were sent on the mission and who was flying them. The History of the Armament Department states that “One [sic] the afternoon of June 12th all things were declared ready to commence operations and the Armament Department, now consisting of one officer, two Sergeants, and three corporals, received orders to ‘bomb up’ seven ships for the first ‘show.’”¹⁶⁷

The official history states that “the first bombing mission undertaken by the 96th was an event which excited great interest in the [Toul] sector. Late afternoon of June 12th found 8 planes loaded with

¹⁶⁴ General Trenchard officially was appointed to command the Independent Air Force on June 15th. The Independent Air Force was part of the RAF but in theory was to be used to attack strategic German targets without coordination with the army or navy. It was absorbed into the RAF after the end of WWI.

¹⁶⁵ Leiser, “Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron,” p. 162.

¹⁶⁶ Hopper, Bruce, “American Day Bombardment in World War I,” *Air Power Historian*, April 1957, p. 88-89.

¹⁶⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 79.

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bombs and ready for the long-anticipated raid to a hostile objective, in this case Dommary-Baroncourt.”¹⁶⁸

The “report of operations carried out on the 12th day of June 1918” lists seven bombing teams scheduled to fly the mission:

<u>Pilot</u>	<u>Observer</u>
Major Harry M. Brown	Lt. Howard G. Rath
Lt. Henry C. Lewis	Lt. Claxton H. Tichenor
Lt. Belmont F. Beverly	Lt. Frank J. Newbury
Lt. Joseph M. Mellen	Lt. Rowan H. Tucker
Lt. Herbert D. Smith	Lt. George A. Ratterman
Lt. Robert G. Browning	Lt. James E. Duke, Jr.
Lt. Charles “Pat” Anderson	Lt. Hugh S. Thompson

This report is signed by Lt. Howard G. Rath, the operations officer.¹⁶⁹

However, on the bottom of the same page is typed, in upper case, “CORRECTION TO ABOVE OPERATIONS REPORT.” The correction, written by the Group Operations Officer, 1st Lt. Howard G. Rath, states that “The pilots and observers who participated in the first day bombing raid are as follows:

<u>Pilot</u>	<u>Observer</u>
Major Henry M. Brown	2 nd Lt. Howard G. Rath
1 st Lt. Durwood L. MacDonald	2 nd Lt. Alfred R. Strong
1 st Lt. Joseph M. Mellen	2 nd Lt. Rowan H. Tucker
1 st Lt. Henry C. Lewis	1 st Lt. Claxton H. Tichener
1 st Lt. Charles P. Anderson	1 st Lt. Hugh S. Thompson

All other planes dropped out before reaching lines.

H.G. Rath, 1st Lt. A.S.U.S.A.

Group Operations officer.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 4. Eight planes were said to be loaded, but only seven flew. The reason for the discrepancy is unknown.

¹⁶⁹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 85.

¹⁷⁰ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 85.



Figure 14. Participants in the first bombing raid plus Royal Flying Corps spectators. Left to right: Newberry, Tucker, Lewis, Beverly, Duke, Capt. Ward (Royal Flying Corps), Maj. Gray (Royal Flying Corps), Strong, Rath, Maj. Brown, Mellen, Browning, MacDonald, Tichener, Smith, Ratterman, H. Thompson, and Anderson.

Besides being the operations officer, Rath flew on the mission as observer in the lead plane piloted by squadron commander Major Harry Brown. Rath was 30 years old, two years over the age limit for flyers. He applied for, and received, special consideration that allowed him to fly. This corrected list of the five bombing teams that took part in the 1st mission must be considered as definitive. These ten men made history by flying the first-ever United States bombing mission. It should be noted that the team of Durwood MacDonald and Alfred Strong, who flew the historic mission as shown on the corrected operations report, is not listed among the original seven teams on the “report of operations carried out on the 12th day of June 1918”.

When Howard G. Rath was listed as an observer, his rank was 2nd Lieutenant. However, on the corrected operations report where he signed as Group Operations officer, the creator of the report, he listed himself as 1st Lieutenant. It is likely that the corrected report was created after he had been promoted to 1st Lieutenant but refers to a time when he was a 2nd Lieutenant, and so he is listed as such in the report of the raid itself. Reports of raids that take place in September, for example, still list Rath as 2nd Lieutenant in both the body of the report as an observer, as well as at the end where he is Group

Operations officer, the creator of the report.¹⁷¹

Per the History of the Armament Department, orders were received to “bomb up” the ships for the first “show.” Each was loaded with sixteen of the small bombs [115-mm Michelin short pattern bombs, 8.1 kilos per bomb], making a total weight of 129.6 kilos (285.7 pounds) per airplane.

The target was the railroad yards and warehouses at Dommary-Baroncourt, twenty miles northeast of Verdun. The 8.1 kilo 115-mm Michelin short pattern bombs were designed as anti-personnel weapons and were known to be inappropriate for bombing a railway yard, but they were all that was available to the squadron. Rather than wait, for who knew how long, for more effective bombs, Major Brown ordered the raid.

Major Brown led the first mission’s flight of seven planes. They took off around 4 p.m. Two planes soon returned with engine troubles. After reaching their bombing altitude of 4,000 meters (13,123 feet), the five Breguets proceeded to the target.

Lead observer Howard Rath lined up the bomb run into the wind. When over the target each aircraft watched the lead plane, and when Rath released his bombs the rest of the formation dropped theirs as well. The operations report indicates that the station at Dommary-Baroncourt was hit with one bomb along with two bursts in the railroad yards and the “remainder on warehouse near station.”

The bombers were fired on by anti-aircraft defenses north of the town of Etain both going and returning from the target. They were also fired upon at Dommary-Baroncourt. Enemy anti-aircraft accuracy was described as “very poor.” However, shortly after leaving the target area the formation was attacked by three German scout planes. The aircraft of the 96th closed into a tight formation. The observers maintained steady machine-gun fire that kept the enemy at a distance.¹⁷²

Enemy anti-aircraft fire was often very accurate and damaging, especially when the formation was on the bomb run where they had to fly straight and level in order to bomb accurately. A difficulty the enemy had was determining the exact altitude of the bombers to set their fire to burst properly.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 85 and p. 90.

¹⁷² Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 5.

¹⁷³ Leiser, “Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron,” p. 160.

The route to the target was not as the crow flies, which would be north from Amanty to the target, since that would have required the bombers to fly sixty total miles over enemy territory, crossing the lines just south of St. Mihiel. Instead, they flew forty-five miles NNW to Verdun over friendly territory. From Verdun they turned NE, crossing the lines, and flew fifteen miles to the target, then returned by way of Verdun, for roughly thirty total miles over enemy-held territory.

Perhaps it was due to the excitement of the moment, but no railway traffic was observed by the inexperienced flyers. Nor was any movement by roads, convoys, or troops observed. No photographs were taken.¹⁷⁴

By 7:30 p.m. the flight had not returned, and the men left behind at Amanty were clearly worried. At 7:45 aircraft appeared in the distance. The engine of Pat Anderson's and Hugh's aircraft sputtered and died on landing. At the limit of its fuel supply, another Breguet ran out of fuel before reaching Amanty but landed safely in a nearby field. The rest landed safely at Amanty.

Anderson was asked "Did the Archies [enemy anti-aircraft fire] bother you much?" "Nothing to them, they're a joke" was the response. "See any Boches?" "Sure, take a look at the motor" replied the calm Pat Anderson. The mechanics opened the cowl and found two valve stems carried away by explosive bullets.¹⁷⁵

Anderson's comment is somewhat reminiscent of George Washington's remark to his brother in a letter written May 31, 1754, after the Battle of Jumonville Glen, where he wrote, "I can with truth assure you, I heard bulletts [sic] whistle and believe me there is something charming in the sound."¹⁷⁶

The 96th Aero Squadron had gone to war. Nothing bonds men closer than being shot at, returning fire, and returning safely. Hugh and Pat were, as were the others, forevermore a tight team. They were brothers.

Of the original seven planes that left Amanty, "five machines reached the objective, dropped their bombs and returned safely to the home field, making the pioneering American raid very successful

¹⁷⁴ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 85

¹⁷⁵ Codman, *Contact*, p. 28.

¹⁷⁶ George Washington to his brother, John Augustine Washington, May 31, 1754 referring to the skirmish of May 28, 1754 which began the French and Indian War. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/02-01-02-0058> accessed August 21, 2019.

event in which 648 kilos of explosives were accurately launched.”¹⁷⁷ This equates to 1428.6 pounds, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of a ton, of explosives in total were dropped on the first mission.

On this first mission, of the eighty bombs dropped, two hit the railroad yard, one hit the station and the rest hit a warehouse. This was not very accurate. However, it was the first raid and, with experience, the men would do better. Of great importance was not the accuracy of the bombing, or the size or suitability of the bombs, but rather that the United States had bombed an enemy for the first time in its history. It was a great day for the U.S. military. The Americans were taking the war to the enemy from the air.

The first mission took about four hours. With experience, the flight time would be reduced to about two hours due to better route planning and navigation.

The 96th squadron history records “that night the entire squadron joined in a camp jubilee to celebrate the unqualified success of the first American bombing raid.”¹⁷⁸ No doubt the other squadrons on the airdrome joined in the celebration. Hugh had no way of knowing but, within a week of this first raid, his cousin, who is referred to here as HST Infantry, would be wounded in combat.

The first American air raid and the subsequent raids on the 14th and 18th were widely reported in the American newspapers. The *New York Times* article appeared on the June 15th front-page under the headline: “Americans In Air Raid Beyond Metz Bomb German Towns and Railway: Fight Way Back.”¹⁷⁹ Neither the squadron, nor the airmen involved, were named. However, the Americans had taken the offensive in the air and the newspapers were making the most of it.

While the raid was only a pinprick, a minor annoyance, it boosted morale and raised hopes that American airpower would be able to seriously damage Germany’s ability to wage war and hurt German morale. Some thought that the impact on German morale alone might even bring the war to a close.

¹⁷⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol., 14 p. 79.

¹⁷⁸ Hudson, *Hostile Skies*, p. 86; Codman, *Contact*, p. 28. Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 5.

¹⁷⁹ “Americans in Air Raid Beyond Metz Bomb German Towns and Railway; Fight Way Back,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1918, p. 1. “Fliers damage Depot; Escape Enemy Planes,” *The Sun* [New York] June 15, 1918, p. 1. “80 bombs Dropped in First Air Raid, Americans Defeat German Planes After Expedition,” *The Sun* [New York], June 15, 1918, p. 1.

Six months before, on December 23, 1917, Brigadier General Benjamin D. Foulois, wrote a memorandum concerning his observations of two small air raids that occurred over London in the previous week:

I also saw hundreds of poor people sleeping on the station platforms of the underground railway stations, because they were too frightened to go to their homes. So far, the air raids on London and the coast of England have been carried out by German squadrons in very small numbers, and on this particular raid only about 40 bombs were dropped. The morale effect, however, on the British people, of this small number of bombs was very great in proportion to the physical damage (10 killed, 70 wounded – 4 small fires and several houses wrecked).

Upon investigation, the morning after this raid, I learned that from the time of the first warning is sent out until the “all clear” signal was given, practically all work ceases in factories and other industries. This particular raid which I witnessed, kept the anti-aircraft batteries surrounding London, busy for nearly four hours, putting up a barrage about the city.

When one computes the manhours lost, in a city the size of London, it is readily understood why the British War policy is being directed to taking active offensive measures against the air menace of the Germans.¹⁸⁰

Foulois may have overstated the effect of bombing on the morale of the population, but he was entirely correct on the huge effect a few enemy aircraft had on industrial production.

The New York Times, June 16, 1918, carried a long article concerning the anticipated great importance of U.S. aviation in helping to bring the war to a conclusion, stating in part:

It is true that the French and British air squadrons have been as busy as hornets in this work; but let us not lose sight of the potentiality of American efforts, not only at the front but for miles back of the lines. The day is coming when the allied air fleets will be so

¹⁸⁰ Mauer Mauer, *U.S. Air Service in WWI*, vol. 2, p. 161-162.

strengthened by contributions from America that they will be able to destroy a fortified town in one morning and stop the advance of German divisions with demoralizing slaughter. All the enemy's resources will prove unavailing to withstand grand assaults from the air, and the civilian population of fortified places will lose faith in the German war machine and the German General Staff and clamor for peace on any terms.¹⁸¹

In the same article the magnitude of the capacity for destruction was laid out:

The execution done by the French and British bombing squadrons far surpasses American results at present, which is to be expected. Our allies think nothing of dropping twenty or thirty tons of explosives on communications, depots, and railway stations in twenty-four hours. It is all in the day's work, and attacks are incessant. This is a British statement: 'Bombing was carried out vigorously all day. Thirty-eight tons of bombs were dropped on various targets, including railways, roads, dumps and billets, at Merville, Armentieres, Bapaume, Albert, and Valenciennes.' By the end of the summer American aviators will be competing in the necessary work of destruction with the French and British. In the war in the air the Allies, who have now a mastery, will become irresistible and supreme, and for two hundred miles behind the German lines no place of military importance will be secure.¹⁸²

Some thought that this vision of unlimited destruction potential extended to include the possibility of aviation being so powerful that war itself might no longer be possible. *The New York Times*, on June 22nd, quoted British Major General William Brancker¹⁸³ saying:

The progress of aviation during the last four years has been little short of marvelous, and there is no reason why

¹⁸¹ "The War in the Air," *The New York Times*, June 16, 1918, p. 24.

¹⁸² "The War in the Air," *The New York Times*, June 16, 1918, p. 24.

¹⁸³ Sir William Sefton Brancker, KCB, AFC, 1877-1930. Commonly known as Sir Sefton Brancker.

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its progress during the next four years should not be equally so; every day its importance as a factor toward ending the war increases, and it is a branch of warfare in which the Allies should be able to make far more rapid progress than the Germans whose material resources are far more restricted and whose pilot can never be as good as ours in the air. In a few years the possibilities of aviation as an instrument of war are so appalling that it may force civilized nations, at all events in Europe, to agree to abandon war among themselves altogether. War has been the making of aviation; let us hope that aviation may be the destruction of war.¹⁸⁴

The 96th Aero Squadron's five aircraft and ten men were the talk of the town. While their names were not mentioned until after the war their first mission had great consequences that stirred the imagination of the nation.

The 96th Aero Squadron was not simply the first U.S. squadron to fly a bombing mission in the war. For three months it was the *only* operational U.S. bombing squadron. It was September 15th that the 11th and 20th squadrons flew their first missions. The 96th clearly was the pioneer squadron in U.S. bombing history.

¹⁸⁴ "Here to Prepare for Test Flight Across Atlantic," *New York Times*, June 22, 1918, p. 1.

CHAPTER 13

THE BOMBING MISSION

Before the Mission

The preparation for a bombing mission could be relatively simple or very complex depending upon the target itself and how many aircraft or formations would be flying the mission.¹⁸⁵

Quality maps were furnished. Secondary targets were indicated, as were the locations of known German anti-aircraft batteries. The maps were on cardboard that was hinged so they would fold allowing easy use in the cockpit.¹⁸⁶

Very briefly, the squadron would receive orders for a bombing mission that would include the specific target and the time of the attack. The squadron commander would then have a conference with his armament officer and flight leader. They would determine the number of aircraft to commit to the mission. In the case of the 96th squadron which never had a surplus of aircraft, this would usually be most of the aircraft that were available for operations.

Depending on the type of target, the number and type or types of bombs to be carried would be selected. Some bombs were better for anti-personnel, others for incendiary or destruction of buildings or railroad tracks. The time between the release of individual bombs would be calculated depending on how far apart the bomb bursts would be on the ground.

The route to the target was critical. Wind direction, distance flown over enemy territory, and known enemy anti-aircraft artillery would be plotted. The direction of the bomb run was important as it was usually best to bomb into the wind to provide better accuracy. Bombing altitude was a factor, although 4,000 meters (13,123 feet) was the norm.

The Germans placed anti-aircraft batteries near the choice railroad

¹⁸⁵ The Preparation for a Bombing Mission summary is from Captain Bruce C. Hopper's unpublished *When the Air Was Young*, 1918, p. 64.

¹⁸⁶ Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 162.

targets. These guns did more than attempt to shoot down Allied aircraft or disrupt the observer operating his bombsight. They were also used to signal enemy pursuit airplanes to the presence of Allied raiders. A line of bursts would be fired pointing toward the U.S. bomber formation to attract the attention of German patrols.¹⁸⁷

Every mission had a flight leader as well as a deputy leader and a secondary deputy leader. If the leader would drop out of the formation, whether due to mechanical failure or enemy action, the deputy would move into the leader position and lead the mission.¹⁸⁸

The flight leaders would select which bombing team would fly in which position in the formation. In the early days of the 96th, there was much discussion of the benefits and difficulties of various formations. The Breguet did not allow for good low-forward viewing by the pilot which made formation flying difficult at times. The formation also had to protect itself with the twin machine guns of the observers without creating dead angles that would not be well covered and would give attacking aircraft an advantage. In addition, each airplane must be able to see the flight leader as the flight leader not only led the formation but also signaled the rest of the flight to drop their bombs based on when the leader dropped his.

A man's first bombing flight into combat was like no other. It was an adventure, but flight itself is an adventure and still new to the world in 1918. The flyers would be eager to go all morning. After the pre-flight briefing everyone would be primed and ready. They would hear the engines start, and warm up, for seemingly a long time. The plane would have been checked, and double-checked, by the mechanics who afterwards would stand around waiting and watching. The aircraft would have been bombed up for over an hour when it was time to go.

Walking across the field, the crews stiffly and awkwardly would joke and shout the occasional light-hearted and forced jocular commentary to each other.

The heavy leather flight clothes were too hot, but when two miles in the sky the clothes would be fine. After the pilots climbed aboard, they checked the instruments: compass, tachometer, oil pressure and oil temperature, and water temperature. The rudder would be moved, to ensure it moved smoothly, as were the elevators and ailerons. Observers would check the guns, ammunition, the release mechanism

¹⁸⁷ Hopper, *When the Air Was Young*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁸ Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 162.

for the bombs, the Very pistol and flares. Especially on the early missions, the crew got knots in their stomachs and dry mouths.

The crews would take a look around at each other. This is what all the training for the last year had been aimed at. Now was the time to put it to use. Finally, the leader would raise his arm and look around. If the pilots all gave a thumbs up, the chocks were removed, and the leader started to trundle across the muddy field to take position in flight formation facing into the wind. The formation would follow.

Flying the Mission

When taking off, the flight leader and pilots of no. 2 and no. 3 would leave the ground at the same time. Nos. 4 and 5 would start their roll as soon as the wheels of Nos. 2 and 3 were in the air, and so on until the entire formation was in flight. On the take-off, everyone kept an eye on the leader and on the aircraft to the right or left. Feet danced on the rudder bar, to keep the plane going straight. Controls would be sluggish because of the weight of the bombs and the muddy field keeping the speed down. When all were flying in formation the flight leader would increase speed to the normal traveling speed and gain altitude.

The Breguet could carry a 500-pound bomb load and reach 4,000 meters in thirty-five minutes. Bombing altitude would be attained while at least three miles from the lines so that the leading observer could make the necessary adjustments to his bombsight without being distracted by anti-aircraft fire or enemy aircraft. Any aircraft that could not keep up with the formation was required to drop out and head back to the airdrome. At no time would the formation or any individual aircraft attempt to provide cover for an aircraft that for whatever reason could not keep up or was damaged by enemy fire. Maintaining the formation was critical.

Pilots would guard against side-slipping or stalling into the ground like Metzger and Robertson who were killed at Clermont a few weeks earlier. The pilots followed along straight ahead in a very flat climb, picking up airspeed which equals safety. Losing the engine now would be bad, very bad.

All would be well once the formation was up, moving faster with everyone in position. After the climb, the wide view below would open up. In the north in the far distance, toward the lines would be

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seen the churned-up earth, i.e., the network of trenches: a stripe a couple miles wide across the ground that was the front line trenches. The trenches stretched beyond the horizon over 350 miles from the sea to the Alps.

At 4000 meters, about 2½ miles high, they would make a gentle turn toward the target and cross the lines. The ugly brown swath of brown and yellow stretching to the horizon passed below. Roughly parallel trenches faced each other across no man's land, the complicated network, with secondary trenches and third line trenches to the rear. To the northwest, it encompassed the ruins of a city, Verdun. Many thousands of infantry, the P.B.I., the Poor Bloody Infantry, were down there in the mud.

The observers would stand up into the slipstream and look around in all directions for enemy aircraft. Planes flew 50 meters apart, then closed to 30 meters for the bomb run. If under enemy attack they would close to 20 meters.

When near the target area the leading observer, while looking through the window slot in the floor, would steer his pilot with reins attached to the pilot's arms, as the pilot could not see the target he was approaching under the nose of the aircraft. The leading observer would fire the "prepare to bomb" signal of a flare with six green stars to alert the rest of the formation. All eyes would then be on the lead airplane awaiting the release of its bombs. When the image of the target appeared at the black line in the bombsight, the leading observer would pull the bomb dropping lever. The pilots or observers in the rest of the formation would then drop their bombs.

The airplanes would lurch upward with the loss of the weight of the bombs. Everyone would look over the sides. They could not see the bombs falling. If there was a flash and white smoke on the target, it meant success. If there were more and more of them, it meant even more success.

The formation immediately would turn and leave the area on the pre-determined course. The appearance of enemy aircraft may make a different route more favorable. Spending the minimum amount of time over hostile territory was the aim of every flight leader. The leader would always take advantage of the wind to regain the lines if possible. The formation would avoid flying under clouds where enemy aircraft may be concealed. However, clouds near the level of flight would sometimes be utilized for protection by providing cover for the bombers. Speed did not enter very much into the safe return of

the formation. The formation was to be formed to afford no vulnerable point of attack, as its safety depended upon its defensive fire superiority.

Having re-crossed the lines with no enemy in hot pursuit the formation leader would begin a long glide toward the airdrome. When nearing the field, the leading observer would fire a green flare as a signal to break formation. The airplanes would circle the airdrome and land according to their number in the formation.

After the Mission

The mechanics had their work cut out for them after each mission. Even before the first mission, the official report of the Engineering Department states that the first ten planes of the squadron, "all in very poor condition for bombing missions over the enemy's lines, were put into shape due to the spirit of the department and such materials as could be utilized from the surrounding country." There were "no equipment and no spare parts" available. "Some five bombing missions were carried out with the planes in more or less of an unserviceable condition."¹⁸⁹

Aircraft were repaired:

by robbing parts from old worn-out farm machinery discarded by French peasants in the vicinity of the airdrome. Part of a weather-beaten harvester was used for a tail post on one of the planes, [iron] wagon tires were cut up and used for tail skids, and pieces of an ox-cart tongue were employed to reinforce the wing spars on several planes. One of the planes carried brace wires which had once served on the telephone line of communications. Plane No. 4014 had crashed in a bad field and was salvaged for spare parts.¹⁹⁰ Every one of the remaining nine planes, when put in the available list, carried some part of plane No. 4014, and thus the squadron was able to operate long before spare parts from the Supply Depot at Colombey-les-Belles were

¹⁸⁹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 67.

¹⁹⁰ Plane 4014 crashed on June 15, 1918; it was being flown by 1st Lt. Cecil G. Sellers. Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 75.

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obtainable.¹⁹¹

At Amanty keeping the aircraft in reasonable, or even marginal, flying condition was a huge undertaking. The mechanics would begin work as soon as an aircraft returned from a flight. Two men were assigned to each aircraft with additional men as needed. Refueling was done from drums. After a raid the planes were thoroughly checked, serviced and in many cases overhauled.

The muddy airfield was a serious hazard. Mud picked up by the tires would spin off and hit the wooden propellers breaking them. This was an everyday occurrence. Quentin Roosevelt had a narrow escape while taking off from a muddy field. His propeller was broken by mud and a piece of propeller blade flew into his gas tank. He wrote that

...before I even had a chance to cut the switch, the whole thing was in flames. I made a wild snatch at my safety belt, got it undone, and slid out of the plane on the doublequick time. It can't have taken me more than thirty seconds, and yet when I got out my boots and pant legs were on fire.¹⁹²

Due to lack of space in the hangars, half the planes were forced to remain out in the weather, which caused additional problems. Much of the work on the airplanes was done in the open under the tree canopy.

If a plane was forced down away from the airdrome, either the pilot or observer stayed with the plane to guard it while the other sought out a telephone to call the Operations Officer explaining as well as possible what condition the plane was in and where it was located. The Engineering Department would then go to the scene and either salvage, repair or arrange for the aircraft to be transported back to Amanty. Getting new planes was very difficult. Therefore, the old ones were repaired whenever even remotely possible, and "new wings, landing carriages, controls, and even tail sections, stabilizers, rudders, were replaced."¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 4.

¹⁹² Roosevelt, *Quentin Roosevelt, A Sketch With Letters*, Letter of December 8, 1917, p. 79-80.

¹⁹³ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 73.

CHAPTER 14

THE EARLY MISSIONS

The day following the historic first mission the airmen were keyed up for another raid across the lines. However, the weather was hazy and windy. So no mission was flown. Good visibility was essential for a mission to be flown not just to allow the target to be visible but also for navigation as getting lost was a danger that must be avoided. Going up for practice flying in formation, behind the lines, was the only activity in the air on June 13th.

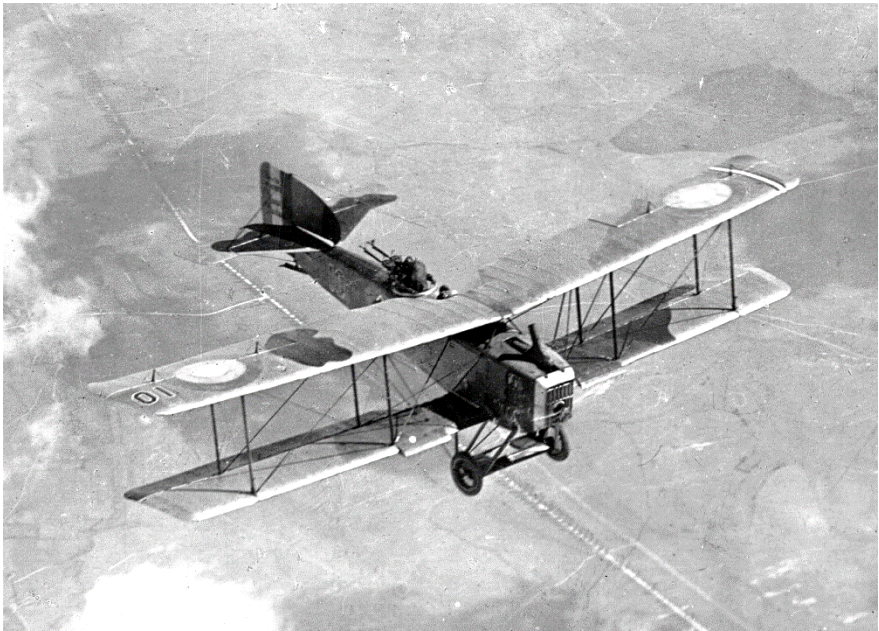


Figure 15. Breguet 14 B2.

There is no definitive record of the bombing missions for the 96th Aero Squadron. The official squadron history, which is within the *Gorrell's History of the American Expeditionary Forces Air Service, 1917-1919*, Series E, volume 14, has a "Report of Operations" that begins on page 85. There is also "The Daily Log of the 96th Squadron" that begins on page 33. In addition, within Bruce C. Hopper's *When*

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the Air Was Young, there is a section entitled "Part IV, Daily Log of the Operations of the 96th Squadron." The three records, while mostly in agreement, are not copies of each other.

It must be assumed that the squadron records simply were not kept accurately in the field. Pilots, observers, aircraft and even targets may have changed between the time the operations were planned and carried out. These changes likely were very informal and even spur of the moment. For the most part, this history describes the missions flown based on *Gorrell's History*, "Report of Operations" starting on page 85.

On June 14th the visibility was fair for the squadron's second mission. With an ear-splitting roar, they took off at 5:50 p.m., returning at 7:50 p.m. The large railroad yard at Conflans was the target. Forty-six miles north of Amanty, was to become a frequent target. The flight was flown by:¹⁹⁴

Pilot

Lt. Andre H. Gundelach
Lt. Herbert D. Smith
Lt. Charles R. Codman
Lt. Robert G. Browning
Lt. Roger Clapp
Lt. Belmont F. Beverly

Observer

Lt. Pennington H. Way
Lt. George A. Ratterman
Lt. Virgil A. Hower
Lt. James E. Duke, Jr.
Lt. James A. O'Toole
Lt. Frank J. Newbury

The aircraft of Beverly and Newbury turned back with engine trouble before crossing the lines. The leader, one of the two squadron pilots with combat experience (the other being Roger Clapp), Andre Gundelach, led the five-plane formation to Conflans through "active and accurate" anti-aircraft fire at Verdun, Pont-a-Mousson and Conflans. Gundelach's observer, Pennington "Pinky" Way, dropped his bombs accurately. The formation's seventy-nine eight-kilo (1393 pounds) bombs' bursts were observed on the roundhouse, the tracks, and buildings to the north of the roundhouse. The roundhouse when

¹⁹⁴ Lists of the flying officers of the 96th Aero Squadron appear in more than one place in *Gorrell's History*. While they have some errors, and are not entirely consistent with each other, they are the best available. See Gorrell, Series N, vol. 16, p. 181-183 for "Commissioned Personnel of the 96th Aero Squadron." Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 30-33 also for "Commissioned Personnel of the 96th Aero Squadron." Gorrell, Series M, vol. 38, p. 79 for "Casualties 96th, Aero Squadron – Day Bombardment, Battle Casualties."

last seen was in flames. There was no recorded explanation why seventy-nine bombs were dropped rather than the 80 that were carried.

While the bombs were not suitable for railroad tracks nor buildings, they were better than nothing. The mission would also give the men experience. And, there was always the optimistic theory that bombing would destroy morale.

The railroad yard at Conflans, the most frequent target of the squadron, was a large target. It measured roughly 250 yards north to south and 1100 yards east to west. That equates to about 56 acres or more than 50 football fields. However, bombing from over two miles in altitude from an airplane moving 100+ miles per hour was not a sure thing by any means in WWI.

One enemy aircraft was observed but it did not attack. A fragment from an anti-aircraft shell struck the wing of Roger Clapp's plane tearing a hole in the fabric. No further damage was done. At the end of the day, there were ten aircraft on hand and six available for duty.¹⁹⁵

Rain washed out all flying on June 15th and added to the mud on the field. On the 16th no missions were flown due to poor visibility. However, there were six practice flights in formation and some target practice. The next day more rain washed out all flying.

The many requisitions for bombs finally began paying off. Within three weeks the squadron received enough bombs to last to the end of the war. On June 15th six hundred 115-mm Michelin long pattern bombs were obtained from Park No. 10 depot near Toul, twenty miles away. These weighed 20.2 kilos, or 45 pounds, an excellent weight for demolition work on railroads.

On the 21st the squadron was able to pick up four hundred more. Four days later 1150 more arrived. July 8th brought seven hundred fifty 90-mm fragmentation bombs. Each weighed 9.2 kilos, or 20.3 pounds. The 90-mm bombs carried their fuse in the nose instead of the tail of the bomb. This arrangement allowed the bombs to explode prior to the bomb being buried in the ground thus allowing the broken fragments of the case, which was made of heavy metal, to be scattered with great violence in all directions, without the bomb dissipating its force by tearing a crater in the ground. This bomb was only used against enemy personnel or draft animals.¹⁹⁶

The railroad yard at Conflans was again bombed on June 18th. The

¹⁹⁵ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 33 and 86.

¹⁹⁶ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, History of the Armament Department, p. 79.

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mission took off at 6:17 p.m. and returned at 8:37 p.m.

This mission was flown by:

Pilots

Lt. Thornton D. Hooper
Lt. Lewis F. Turnbull
Lt. Roy W. Hall
Captain James A. Summersett
Lt. Bradley J. Gaylord
Lt. Thomas H. Farnsworth
Lt. Belmont F. Beverly

Observers

Lt. Howard G. Rath
Lt. Arthur H. Cawston
Lt. Avrome N. Hexter
Lt. Ralph I. Coryell
Lt. Warren S. Pressler
Lt. Robert E. Thompson
Lt. Frank J. Newbury

The team of Farnsworth and Bob Thompson, as well as that of Beverly and Newbury, returned before reaching the lines.

Thirty-eight 20-kilo (1675 pounds), 115-mm Michelin long pattern bombs were dropped, and four bursts were observed on the railroad tracks. The enemy anti-aircraft fire was "active and accurate." Several enemy aircraft were seen in the distance, but they did not attack the formation.¹⁹⁷

The next three days were heavily overcast and rainy, preventing any flights for either practice or missions.

On June 22nd a mission took off at 2:10 p.m. and returned at 3:41 p.m. without crossing the lines due to cloudy weather. Ten aircraft were on hand, five available for duty.

There was no flying on the 23rd and 24th due to the cloudy weather. The men were frustrated and wanted to get into the air even in minimal conditions.

June 25th brought marginal weather and the decision was made to try to bomb Conflans once again. The formation took off at 9:46 a.m. and returned at 11:40 a.m.

Pilots

Lt. Andre Gundelach
Lt. Cecil G. Sellers
Lt. Belmont F. Beverly
Lt. Thomas H. Farnsworth
Lt. Cecil P. Young
Lt. Douglas R. Buchanan

Observers

Lt. Pennington Way
Lt. Elisha E. Evans
Lt. Frank J. Newbury
Lt. Robert E. Thompson
Lt. Harry O. Lawson
Lt. Donald D. Warner

¹⁹⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 34.

The route for this raid was via Gondrecourt, Bar-le-Duc, Verdun, Conflans, Chambley, Voucouleurs, and Amanty. Two unspecified aircraft dropped out of the formation before crossing the lines. Four aircraft continued to the target. The airmen thought that their bombs had probably struck the eastern end of the railroad yards, but the visibility was very poor, so they really did not know. They reported active but inaccurate anti-aircraft fire.

At the end of the day the squadron had nine planes on hand and four available for duty.

A mission was attempted on June 26th but returned before crossing the lines. There was no mission on the 27th. However, on the 28th a mission was attempted but once again returned an hour later without recording an explanation for never having crossed the lines. Visibility was recorded as being "fair."

The 29th brought no mission but three test flights went up for target practice. Weather again was recorded as fair. There was no mission on the 30th despite fair weather.

July brought fair weather; yet there were no missions flown on the 1st, 2nd, or the 3rd. The record does not give an explanation why no missions were flown in the good weather. It rained on the 4th which prevented flying. A mission on the 5th was attempted but turned back due to poor visibility. The men were becoming frustrated not being able to fly. Some of the men had not flown a mission yet and were understandably anxious to join their comrades as veterans.

July 6th saw no mission but a dramatic fatal accident. Pilot 1st Lt. Roger Clapp, second only to Gundelach in combat experience, and his passenger Sgt. 1st Class Robert J. Dunn were on a test flight. The aircraft stalled during a turn at 200 meters in altitude over the airdrome and "drilled into the ground, bursting into flames as it struck. Both the pilot and the observer were killed and burned up. The plane was a total loss."¹⁹⁸ The squadron again was confronted with furiously flaming wreckage consuming two of their comrades, with the resulting unforgettable stench of burning flesh.

There was fair weather on the 7th but no mission was flown. In place of a mission, the squadron buried Clapp and Dunn with military honors. The aircraft inventory was now seven planes on hand and four available for service.

¹⁹⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 35.

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July 8th was fair, but no mission was flown. Rain prevented any flying on the 9th.

July 10th was cloudy, windy, rainy and visibility was poor...yet, a mission was flown.

CHAPTER 15

MAJOR HARRY BROWN FLIES INTO INFAMY

Billy Mitchell, Chief of the U.S. Air Service in France, called the failed mission of July 10th “...the most glaring exhibition of worthlessness we had had on the front.” And, “I know of no other performance in any air force in the war that was as reprehensible as this.”¹⁹⁹

The disaster that was to befall the 96th Squadron may have had its origin earlier in the day. The airmen were hanging about the field idly watching the weather, the scheduled mission having been cancelled. According to Codman, a French observation plane, blown off course and low on fuel, landed seeking lunch and gasoline. The pilot cheerfully remarked that bad weather was good as it allowed airmen to be safe awhile longer before going into danger. Later, Codman recalled “a gleam in the Major’s [Major Brown’s] eye.”²⁰⁰

Late in the afternoon, with flying cancelled, Codman and others went to the Officer’s Club in Neufchateau. Hugh may have been with Codman; if not he likely would have been at Amanty. Shortly after 5 p.m., a sergeant from Amanty appeared at the Officers Club to say that Major Brown was taking his flight up. The shocked airmen quickly climbed into a truck and sped back to the field. To Codman, who had been scheduled to fly the mission, the low ceiling, accompanied by wind and rain made flying a mission impossible.

The officers were excitedly talking, and speculating, about flying a mission under these conditions. Codman remembered the gleam in the Major’s eye when the French pilot spoke of welcoming bad weather as it provided safety. The Major would not stay on the ground hiding from danger and duty in bad weather if he could possibly fly.²⁰¹

Codman and the others arrived at the field just as the last plane of

¹⁹⁹ Mitchell, William, *Memoirs of World War I*, (New York: Random House, 1960), p. 242.

²⁰⁰ Codman, *Contact*, p. 48.

²⁰¹ Codman, *Contact*, p. 48-49.

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the flight was disappearing into the low clouds. It was 6:05 p.m.

Pilots

Major Harry M. Brown
Lt. Durwood L. MacDonald
Lt. Joseph M. Mellen
Lt. Herbert D. Smith
Lt. Henry C. Lewis
Lt. Robert G. Browning

Observers

Lt. MacChesney
Lt. Alfred R. Strong
Lt. Rowan H. Tucker
Lt. George A. Ratterman
Lt. Claxton H. Tichenor
Lt. James E. Duke, Jr.

After the war, pilot Lt. Durwood MacDonald gave a debriefing statement asserting:

Left home airdrome, Amanty, at 6:05 p.m., July 10th to bomb Conflans.

Very strong wind from the South-west and a very heavy bank of clouds in the North-east, the direction of Conflans.

Went to Neufchateau to gain altitude and passed over Amanty in direction of the lines and also passed over the clouds at about the same time. Continued in a very changeable course between east and north from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. without seeing the ground at any time. Came to a big opening in the clouds about 8:00 p.m. and saw a large city below. Made a complete tour of the city, without dropping bombs and started for home at 8:30 p.m., I started my own course, Southwest, and at 9:45 p.m., I was forced to land, owing to darkness and not having any more gasoline.

I knew I was in Germany, but before I had an opportunity to completely destroy the machine, I was taken prisoner.²⁰²

Major Brown's observer, Lt. Harold MacChesney told a similar story:

At 6:05 p.m., on July 10th, six Breguets, forming the first flight of the 96th Aero Squadron, left our Airdrome at Amanty on a bombing mission to Conflans. The day had been cloudy and windy but just before we started the

²⁰² Gorrell, Series M, vol. 10, p. 183-4.

clouds seemed to break toward the lines. Major Harry M. Brown, C.O. 96th acted as flight leader with Lt. MacChesney as his observer. We first headed to the south toward Neufchateau gaining altitude approximating 2500 meters. Circling above the town we headed North by North West, going above the clouds at a point between Vaucauleur and Maxey sur Vaise. We headed North-west by compass for about forty-five minutes and had but one glimpse of the ground, at a point where it was impossible to determine our location. Then we turned East and headed for a break in the clouds, which proved useless. Another break further on appeared and we headed for that. Here we had a good view of a very large town on a broad river, which we could not place on the maps. We decided the town was some place on the Rhine. At 8:00 p.m. we had circled the town and were headed back. I took time for my bomb sight and made the setting, heading for a large factory. Because of uncertainty as to our position, Major Brown ordered me not to signal and drop bombs, for the fact that we had seen no "archie" was confusing. As we were making very little headway we dove for speed, while the formation broke, and each set his own course. We traveled South-west for an hour, diving continuously and landed at 9:00 p.m. having made forty kilometers [25 miles] in the last hour. Major Brown thought that we must be in France for the country resembled that about Commercy. Questioning of a peasant convinced us that we were in Germany. We attempted to start the motor again but failed in this. The crowd came out while we were in the midst of our work and I drove them back with my machine guns. As soon as they left I secured my compass, sight and maps, and broke my altimeter and guns. We headed for a woods where the maps and sights were destroyed and where we hid from our pursuers. At 11 p.m. we started out, crawled through the line of search and walked until morning. We lived while we were out, on potatoes and raw peas, slept in grain fields as far as possible and traveled mostly at night. Several times we met people and usually escaped notice. We were caught

on the 19th crossing the border into Luxembourg.²⁰³

In his post-war debriefing Major Harry Brown admitted that he was blown off course by winds that were far stronger than the 20 to 35 kilometers per hour (12.5 to 22 miles per hour) he had been led to expect from the pre-flight weather report. Brown's observer, Harold MacChesney, measured the wind speed with his bombsight to be 105 kph (65 mph).

Brown stated that:

The following lessons can be deduced from this flight:

1. No flight leader should be allowed to take a formation across the lines until he is thoroughly familiar with all territory which it is possible for him to reach. (An experienced flight leader would have recognized Metz from the air). [Brown saw a town he believed to be Chambley Thiarcourt which actually was Metz, 15 miles to the Northeast, far off his course.]

2. All flight commanders should have a small scale map in their machines, covering all territory which it is possible for a machine to reach in a single flight. (With such a map, I could have known that I was at Coblenz, and that it was utterly impossible for me to get back to our lines. I could then have headed for Holland, dropping my bombs on Coblenz, Cologne, or Essen.)

3. There should be with each bombardment and observation group, or single squadron acting alone, a machine, preferably a scout machine, used for the purpose of testing direction and velocity of the wind. Cloud conditions over the lines could be observed by this machine in making its test.²⁰⁴

The mission was to bomb the railway yards at Conflans fifty miles north of Amanty. However, the south-west wind was so strong that Brown's flight was blown all the way to Coblenz 120 miles north-east of Conflans where they became lost and could not return to the Allied lines before running out of fuel.

Throughout the evening, the remaining airmen of the 96th squadron

²⁰³ Gorrell, Series M, vol. 10, p. 181-182.

²⁰⁴ Gorrell, Series M, vol. 10, p. 34-35.

watched the sky and listened for the sound of aircraft. At eight o'clock flares were lit in an attempt to aid the returning flight. By nine-thirty it was pitch dark except for the flares. Captain George Thomas, the adjutant, walked onto the airfield and told the men what they already knew: there was no point in waiting any longer; Major Brown and the others would not be coming back.

Captain Thomas drove to headquarters at Toul to personally report the loss of Major Brown and most of the squadron to Brigadier General Benjamin D. Foulois, Chief of Air Service, American Expeditionary Forces.

Foulois ordered new replacement aircraft as well as pilots and observers to the 96th Squadron. Major James L. Dunsworth would be sent as Commanding Officer. Captain James A. Summersett would be acting C.O. until the arrival of Dunsworth.²⁰⁵

The following day at 4:00 p.m. a phone call was received from G-2, GHQAEF,²⁰⁶ advising that a German radio transmission was intercepted that told of the capture of five aircraft, with their crews. It was believed that the 6th aircraft had also landed within the German lines.

For the time being the 96th Squadron was out of the fight having but two aircraft on hand, only one of which was serviceable. The squadron would not be operational again until August.²⁰⁷

The Germans obtained six pilots and observers as well as six aircraft without firing a shot. A story was circulated, almost certainly untrue but has become legend, that a German plane dropped a note on an Allied airfield thanking them for the six Breguet bombers and asked the question, "but what do we do with the Major?"²⁰⁸ It was no legend, however, that the 96th was the laughing stock of the Air Service for a time.

Major Brown's promising career was shattered. After the war, he avoided his former military associates. He never attended a West Point reunion and dropped out of sight, haunted for the rest of his life

²⁰⁵ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 36.

²⁰⁶ Military Intelligence, General Headquarters, American Expeditionary Force.

²⁰⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 36.

²⁰⁸ Mauer, Mauer, *The U.S. Air Service in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 89. Ruffin, Steven, "Major Harry Brown and His 'Lost Flight' of the 96th Aero Squadron," *Over the Front*, vol. 19, no. 3, Fall 2004, p. 197.

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by his impetuous decision. He died March 2, 1960.²⁰⁹

In Charles Codman's view, Major Brown may have been better off had he stayed on the ground as did most other squadron commanders. However, "just the same he was game. Even the boys who accompanied him to Germany will tell you that."²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Ruffin, "Major Harry Brown and His 'Lost Flight' of the 96th Aero Squadron," p. 196-221.

²¹⁰ Codman, *Contact*, p. 51.

CHAPTER 16

THE SQUADRON AFTER MAJOR BROWN

The loss of Major Brown's flight was a turning point in the life of the squadron. Once the squadron was restored, the "good old life" was over. The easy raids, the low casualty rate and generally a lack of "war" were soon to change. Beginning in August there would often be more raids, weather permitting, and the intensity of combat would increase.

However, immediately after the debacle of July 10th, there would be no flying, even during good weather, due to a lack of aircraft. On July 16th Major James L. Dunsworth arrived to take command of the squadron. At the same time came the sad news that Quentin Roosevelt, the friend of many of the airmen from their days at Issoudun, had been shot down on the fourteenth.

It was during this period that the squadron adopted its famous insignia, variations of which continue to the present day, of a triangle with the figure of a downward-looking red devil holding a bomb in one hand and thumbing his nose with the other. On May 6th the Office of Chief of Air Service issued a memorandum specifying the numbering and insignia to be painted on aircraft. "Each squadron shall have an official insignia to be painted on the middle of each side of the fuselage. The squadrons will design their own insignia during the period of organizational training. The designs must be submitted to the Chief of Air Service, A.E.F., for approval. The design should be simple enough to be recognizable from a distance."

The memo continues, "No squadron will place any distinctive insignia upon its planes without a written authorization from this office. No application for this authorization will be made until the following conditions have been fulfilled." For bombing squadrons, the condition was "after one month of service at the front." This memorandum was superseded by one dated June 28th that carries the

same wording regarding the insignia.²¹¹

“After one month of service at the front” may have been open for some interpretation. The 96th arrived at Amanty on May 22nd allowing the squadron design to be submitted for approval on June 22nd. The record is silent regarding when the application was submitted and when it was approved. There is a mysterious German photograph of a Breguet bearing a red devil insignia and the number 15 on the fuselage. This aircraft has been mistaken for aircraft number 15 flown by Robert Browning on the fatal July 10th mission. However, it appears that none of the aircraft on that mission bore the famous insignia.

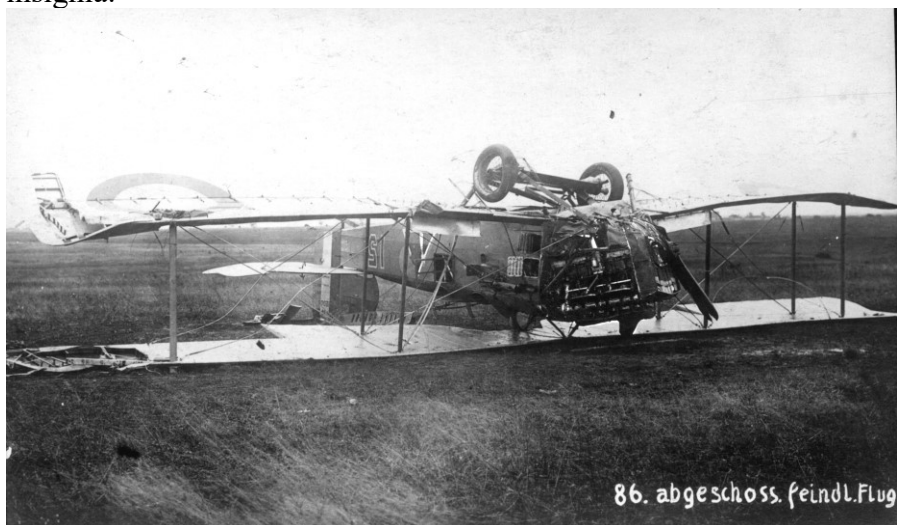


Figure 16. German photo of crashed unidentified 96th Sq. aircraft.

There is some controversy as to who designed the famous insignia. The 96th Squadron history, written by 96th squadron pilots Bruce C. Hopper and David H. Young, which appears in *Gorrell's History*, states: “it [aircraft no. 18] was also the first plane to carry the squadron insignia, of a devil throwing a bomb, designed by Lieut. Harry O. Lawson.”²¹² However, the same squadron historian, Bruce C. Hopper, 38 years later writing in the April 1957 issue of *Air Power Historian* magazine wrote: “It [aircraft no. 18] was also the first plane to carry the squadron insignia, of a devil throwing a bomb, designed by Lt.

²¹¹ Gorrell, Series A, vol. 9, p. 85-86 and p. 110-111.

²¹² Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 9. “It [aircraft no. 18] was also the first plane to carry the squadron insignia, of a devil throwing a bomb, designed by Lieut. Harry O. Lawson.”

Clapp.”²¹³ First it was Lawson, then it was Clapp.

To add to the confusion Bruce Hopper and David Young both joined the 96th on July 18th, at about the time the insignia first appeared. Roger Clapp joined the 96th on June 4th and was killed in an accident on July 6th before Hopper and Young had joined the squadron. Harry Lawson joined the 96th on June 18th. Lawson was still with the squadron at the end of the war. Perhaps the insignia was a joint collaboration between Clapp and Lawson. The real designer of

the insignia is likely forever lost in the mists of time.

July 22nd saw the first flight since the debacle of the 10th. Four flights were made testing bombs. Late in the afternoon five new Breguets arrived to the joy of the squadron. Now, there were seven aircraft on the field although only two were available for flight, as the armament on the new arrivals had to be modified for operations. On the

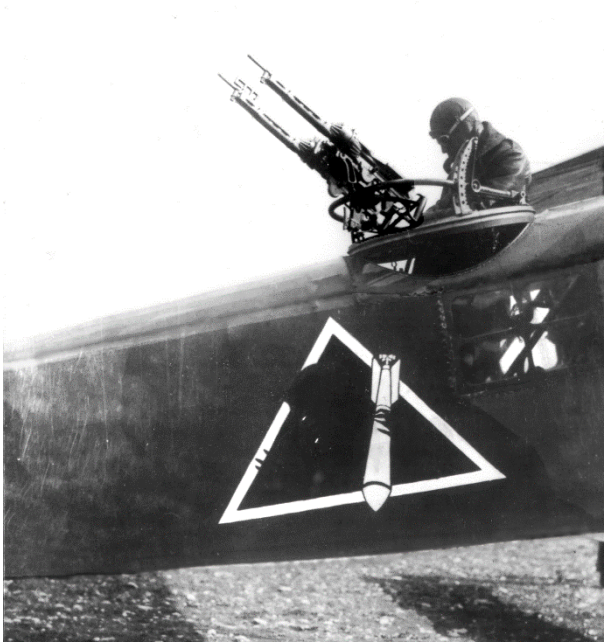


Figure 17. Insignia, guns and observer's window.

23rd three flights were made for target practice. Major Dunsworth was attempting to sharpen the skills of his pilots and observers.

July 24th was a significant day as four new Breguets arrived. Three were the B2 model and one was an A2, the observation model called the Corps d'Armee, which would require the installation of bomb racks, release mechanisms and bombsights. Now, there were thirteen aircraft on hand with seven available for duty. There were seventeen

²¹³ Hopper, Bruce C., "American Day Bombardment in World War I," p. 89.

pilots and fourteen observers available as well.²¹⁴

Nine flights were made on the 26th. Four were for bombing practice and five for machine gun practice. It rained on the 27th which kept the aircraft on the ground. Visibility was poor on the 28th but one flight was made to test an aircraft. The 29th saw one flight by three aircraft for formation practice.

On the night of July 31st, the abandoned airdrome at Epiez, 2.25 miles northeast of Amanty, was bombed by one German aircraft that came in at 200 feet. Twenty-four bombs were dropped but only about ten of these exploded. This attack was mentioned in the Amanty report because the enemy bomber had first circled over the Amanty field and woods where the hangars and huts were located. With no bomb-proof shelters, the men hunkered down in their wooden huts listening to the roaring engine and heard window-rattling crashes. Outside they saw a glow from the northeast. The German did not locate the field at Amanty or mistook the abandoned airdrome at Epiez for Amanty. A memorable close call.²¹⁵

Six flights were made on the 31st. Two were for formation practice and four to test aircraft. There were now thirteen planes on hand, ten available. Seventeen pilots and sixteen observers were available. The men and machines of the 96th squadron were again operational.

The 96th squadron flew once again against the enemy on August 1st. Two formations of five aircraft each took off at 4:06 p.m. to bomb Conflans. They returned at 6:20 p.m.

1st Formation

Pilots

Thornton D. Hooper
Cecil G. Sellers
Raymond C. Taylor
Bruce C. Hopper
Bradley J. Gaylord

Observers

Howard G. Rath
Elisha E. Evans
William A. Stuart
Arthur H. Kelly
Harry O. Lawson

2nd Formation

Andre Gundelach
Charles Codman
David H. Young

Pennington H. Way
Virgil A. Hower
Samuel M. Lunt

²¹⁴ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 36.

²¹⁵ Codman, *Contact*, p. 59.

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Thomas H. Farnsworth
Belmont F. Beverly

James A. O'Toole
Frank J. Newbury

The aircraft of Hopper and Kelly dropped out due to engine trouble after crossing the lines and returned safely. Codman and Hower also had engine trouble and returned. Codman came gliding in over the treetops and suddenly his controls felt mushy and his airplane dropped the last twenty feet to the ground. He had forgotten that he was carrying his load of bombs, and the extra weight at slow speed caused him to crash.

The daily report remarked that Codman and Hower were “not seriously hurt.” That may not have been what Codman and especially Hower thought of their injuries. Codman lacerated his head when it hit the windscreen, and Hower suffered a compound fracture of the arm that put him in the hospital. Hower was out of action for the duration.²¹⁶ He did not return to flying status. The squadron suffered enormous casualties in September while Hower was recovering. His fractured arm may have been a blessing that kept him on the ground, and thus preserved his life. Their Breguet suffered a broken landing gear, lower wings, propeller and “engine bed.”²¹⁷

The August 1st mission dropped forty-eight 20-kilo (2116 pounds) bombs on Conflans. Ten direct hits were observed on the railroad tracks, with “two bursts observed on building on the southwest corner of a group of buildings to the north of station identified by red-cross. These two bursts produced an explosion and fire. Among sheds east of roundhouse four fires and one explosion was observed.”²¹⁸ The record is silent regarding the strike, as well as the explosion and fire of the building protected by the red cross, although pilot David Young described the explosion as a “tremendous explosion so it must have been an ammunition dump!”²¹⁹

Anti-aircraft fire at Conflans was reported as heavy and accurate. Four large enemy aircraft were seen on the ground at Mars-la-Tour. Ten trains of twenty-five cars each were observed at Conflans. After the raid there were thirteen planes on hand and seven available for duty.²²⁰ This was one of the largest and most successful missions to

²¹⁶ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 30.

²¹⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 37.

²¹⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 37.

²¹⁹ Leiser, “Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron,” p. 160.

²²⁰ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 37.

date.

Rain prevented any flying on August 2nd. The squadron now could boast of thirteen airplanes on hand with twelve fit for duty. There were seventeen pilots and seventeen observers available. For the next eight days poor weather prohibited any missions being flown. However, on several of the days, flights were made either to test equipment or to practice formation flying.²²¹

Despite poor visibility due to clouds on August 11th a mission was flown. The mission, involving two formations, left the airdrome at 10:30 a.m. to bomb the railroad station and yards at Dommary-Baroncourt.

1st Formation

Pilots

Cecil G. Sellers
Thomas H. Farnsworth
Arthur H. Alexander
Manvel H. Davis
Lewis F. Turnbull

Observers

Elisha E. Evans
Robert E. Thompson
J. C. E. McLennan²²²
Ralph Anspach
Arthur H. Cawston

2nd Formation

Bradley J. Gaylord
David H. Young
Captain James Summersett
Charles P. Anderson
Belmont F. Beverly

Howard G. Rath
Samuel M. Lunt
Ralph I. Coryell
Hugh S. Thompson
Frank J. Newbury

This was Hugh Thompson's first mission since the 1st mission of June 12th. While he may have had some little time testing or training, he surely was feeling rusty having sixty days pass without being on a mission. Others would have felt the same way.

To gain altitude the flight route included flying east to Colombey-les-Belles, then returning to the southwest to Neufchateau, then north to Gondrecourt (four miles west of Amanty), then northwest to Bar-le-Duc, then north-northeast to Verdun, crossing the lines at

²²¹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 37-38.

²²² John Charles Earle McLennan, born Aug 9, 1891, University of Pennsylvania class of 1916. Ticknor, Caroline, ed., *New England Aviators, 1914-1918, Their Portraits and Their Records*, p. 142.

Bezonvaux, then six miles northeast to Verdun. Near Verdun Captain Summersett turned back due to motor trouble.

After flying east-northeast for eleven miles, they found Dommary-Baroncourt cloud covered. They turned north and flew ten miles where they dropped fifty-six 20-kilo (2469 pounds) bombs on the railroad tracks north of Longuyon.

The return route passed over Spincourt, Dommary-Baroncourt and Conflans and then turned westward over Fresnes. They arrived at Amanty after having been three hours and ten minutes in the air. The aircraft of both Sellers and Farnsworth, running low on fuel, landed at Rozieres-en-Blois. Sellers' tires were punctured by rough ground that caused slight damage to both lower wings. No comment was made for the record regarding enemy aircraft sightings nor anti-aircraft fire.²²³

Charles Codman related a disturbing story of an unexpected visit from two members of the Royal Flying Corps.²²⁴ On an afternoon in August a British DH-4 bomber landed at Amanty with a sputtering Rolls-Royce engine. Under each wing was a large bomb; the aircraft was capable of carrying two 230-pound bombs. The young pilot had lost his formation and was blown off course. It would take several hours to repair the engine; so the pilot and his observer stayed for dinner and the night.

Twenty-two-year-old Pat Anderson remarked, "It seems a shame to knock them off at that age," referring to the British pilot and his observer. Codman asked "why so pessimistic? They will probably both be grandfathers." The hair-raising reply from Anderson was simply, "*not they.*" Codman observed that later "we realized that Pat was never wrong about that kind of thing."

The next morning the British airmen were walked, by their new friends of the 96th, to their plane, which was now running smoothly. They commented that they had just joined their squadron after completing their training. They climbed in and made a long run across the field for a nice take-off. The aircraft made a climbing turn and back around the field as a farewell gesture to the Americans. Turning too steeply with the heavy bomb load, the airplane slipped then stalled into the ground. A huge explosion shook the ground.

The operations officer, Howard Rath, yelled for everyone to keep

²²³ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 38.

²²⁴ Codman, *Contact*, p. 61-62.

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back as only one bomb had gone off. Again, there was the appalling scene as men were incinerated. When they were able to approach the crash site, they found the pilot, having been thrown clear, lying peacefully as if asleep without a mark on him. Little was left of the observer. Pieces of his remains were gathered as well as reasonably possible to the horror of all.²²⁵

Pilot David H. Young would “always remember this incident because it was a foolish demonstration on the part of the British pilot. We walked all around the crash area, picking up pieces - - two or three teeth attached to a piece of bone. It was a terrible thing - - so completely uncalled for!”²²⁶

Conflans' railroad yard was again the target on the afternoon of August 12. The formation left the airdrome at 5:30 p.m.

Pilots

David H. Young
Captain James Summersett
Arthur H. Alexander
Cecil P. Young
Charles Codman
Bruce C. Hopper – Camera
Lewis F. Turnbull

Observers

Samuel M. Lunt
Ralph I. Coryell
J. C. E. McLennan
Hugh S. Thompson
James A. O'Toole
Arthur H. Kelly
Avrome N. Hexter

Codman had engine trouble and never left the field. For the first time Hugh flew with a pilot other than Pat Anderson. Pat was replaced, for this mission only, by Cecil Young.

Visibility was poor due to a ground haze. From an altitude of 4400 meters (14,435 feet) thirty 20-kilo (1322 pounds) bombs were dropped in a trail cutting the eastern neck of the railroad at Conflans. Ten direct hits were closely bunched about the roundhouse and warehouses. There were no fires or explosions. Anti-aircraft fire was moderate and accurate. Photography at the target was unsuccessful. And, once again, no enemy aircraft were sighted. The formation returned at 8:00 p.m.

The squadron had twelve aircraft on hand and nine available for duty. Thirteen pilots and fifteen observers were available.²²⁷

²²⁵ Codman, *Contact*, p. 61-62.

²²⁶ Leiser, “Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron,” p. 165.

²²⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 39, 91.

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At 10:30 on the morning of August 13th a mission was flown to the railroad station and yards at Dommary-Baroncourt. As strike photographs had been less than satisfactory, two aircraft on the mission were equipped with cameras. Arthur Kelly, the photographic officer for the squadron, flew as observer in one of the photographic planes.

Pilots

Bradley J. Gaylord
Capt. James Summersett
Cecil Sellers
Charles Pat Anderson
Arthur Alexander – Camera
Lewis F. Turnbull – Camera

Observers

Howard G. Rath
Ralph I. Coryell
Elisha Evans
Hugh Thompson
J. C. E. McLennan
Arthur Kelly

Forty-four 20-kilo (1940 pounds) bombs were dropped from an altitude of 4300 meters (14,107 feet). Eight direct hits were observed on railroad tracks, and numerous bursts were seen in the field adjoining the tracks. The flight received active but very inaccurate anti-aircraft fire. The flight returned at 1:05 pm. Seven photographic exposures were made, two of which were successful.

Later in the afternoon one aircraft went up to test a camera. There were twelve aircraft on hand, nine available for duty. Fourteen pilots and fifteen observers were available.²²⁸

Two separate missions were flown on August 14th. The first mission left the airdrome at 8:30 a.m. to bomb the railroad yards at Longuyon.

Pilots

Cecil Sellers
David H. Young
Thomas H. Farnsworth
Manvel H. Davis
Charles Codman
Cecil P. Young
Bruce C. Hopper – Camera

Observers

Howard G. Rath
Samuel M. Lunt
Robert E. Thompson
Arthur H. Cawston
James A. O'Toole
Harry O. Lawson
Arthur H. Kelly

The teams of Codman and O'Toole, and Davis and Cawston,

²²⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 15, p. 39.

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could not keep up with the formation and returned to the airdrome. The five remaining bombers continued to the objective where they found the visibility good. They dropped twenty-four 20-kilo (1058 pounds) bombs. Three bursts were observed on the tracks in front of the station and among the roundhouses. Anti-aircraft fire was active and accurate at Longuyon and Spincourt. Two aircraft were hit by shrapnel. Three enemy pursuit planes followed the formation from Etain to Longuyon and back to the lines. They attacked at long range. About 400 shots were exchanged. One aircraft was struck six inches from the observer by an enemy bullet. Ten photographic exposures were taken over the target. The mission returned at 11:05 a.m.

The second mission of the day left the airdrome at 4:30 p.m. to bomb the railroad yards at Dommary-Baroncourt.

Pilots

Thomas H. Farnsworth
Pat Anderson
Bradley J. Gaylord
Capt. James Summersett
Charles Codman
Manvel H. Davis
Lewis F. Turnbull – Camera

Observers

Robert E. Thompson
Hugh S. Thompson
Warren S. Pressler
Ralph I. Coryell
James A. O'Toole
Ralph Anspach
Arthur H. Cawston

All of the aircraft were able to cross the lines. Visibility over the target was good. Forty-eight 20-kilo (2116 pounds) bombs were dropped from an altitude of 4400 meters (14,435 feet) but fell short and landed south and west of the railroad yards. Anti-aircraft fire was moderate and accurate at Etain and Dommary-Baroncourt. Four squadron aircraft were struck by anti-aircraft fire. Hugh Thompson received a "scratched" cheek from shrapnel. It is unclear how serious this wound was, but he did not fly the mission on the following day.

For the first time, four friendly Spad pursuit planes of the 3rd Pursuit Group accompanied the formation to Verdun where three dropped out because of lack of fuel. One completed the escort to the target and back to the Allied lines. Despite the vulnerability of the Breguets, they almost never flew with an escort.

Photographic exposures were made but were unsuccessful. The mission returned to Amanty at 5:50 pm. Twelve planes were on hand,

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nine available for duty. Fourteen pilots and sixteen observers were available for duty.²²⁹

²²⁹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 39-40, 92. Codman, *Contact*, p. 56.

CHAPTER 17

VISIT WITH COUSIN HUGH S. THOMPSON, 168TH INFANTRY

In August, HST Infantry was wounded for the second time. One afternoon as he was lying in the hospital, he was astonished to see the smiling face of cousin Hugh approaching with two other flyers. Hugh had seen HST Infantry's name on a casualty list a couple of months before and occasionally when going through the town of Bazoilles-sur-Meuse, twenty miles from Amanty, would stop at the hospital and inquire if HST Infantry happened to be there. This time he was. Hugh did not know this was HST Infantry's second wound requiring recovery in a hospital.²³⁰

Hugh was accompanied by a Major Baldwin, who was the squadron medical officer, and Pat Anderson.²³¹ Hugh tried to convince the hospital doctors to release HST Infantry into the care of Major Baldwin. He was told to return in a week when HST Infantry would be recovered enough to leave for a visit to the squadron.

A week later, with a four-day pass, HST Infantry was picked up in the squadron's Cadillac with Major Baldwin driving, Pat Anderson in the right front seat while "Lt. Hugh S. Thompson of the 96th Aero Squadron, and Lt. Hugh S. Thompson of the 168th Infantry, lounged importantly in the back seat."²³²

HST Infantry's observations while visiting at Amanty give some glimpses of Hugh's life. He noticed a hole in the field where a crash had killed two men. This was likely the very recent crash and explosion of the British bomber. He described his first view of Amanty as a "cluster of barracks and hangers, half-hidden in a grove."

He noted that many of the flyers had trained along with Hugh at Issoudun where Quentin Roosevelt was highly regarded and whose death on July 14th was much regretted.

²³⁰ Thompson, Hugh S., *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*, p. 142.

²³¹ "Major Baldwin" has not been identified within the 96th Squadron. The roster lists a 1st Lt. William A. Lee as the surgeon.

²³² Thompson, Hugh S., *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*, p. 143.

HST Infantry played draw poker with the flyers and: proceeded to contribute further to the upkeep of the Air Service. Jigsaw bits of social rules cropped out amid the cigarette smoke, banter, and clicking chips. Being a cash customer and being firmly rooted to terra firma besides, the local question of I.O.U.'s and their automatic cancellation by certain aerial events did not apply to me, but left me pop-eyed, nevertheless.²³³

As Major Baldwin was treating HST Infantry's wounds, Hugh, Pat, and Codman looked on commenting that they preferred the Air Service. However, HST Infantry, despite having been wounded twice, as well as gassed, believed that "after things already seen and heard among the flyers, I was still quite satisfied to take my war, if any, with both feet on the ground."

While the preparations were underway for a mission, HST Infantry watched Hugh and Pat stroke a pet blackbird as the bombs were loaded onto the aircraft. He climbed into both cockpits to "examine the 'crate' which, according to the joking proprietors, was the best in the lot."

He watched as the mission left the field "in droning V-shaped flight, after an ear-splitting take-off in swirls of dust." While Hugh was on the mission, Major Baldwin escorted HST Infantry to the photographic section showing him pictures taken of the bombing damage at Conflans and other targets. Soon the mission returned, and the airmen played volleyball.

Rain prevented more flying during HST Infantry's visit. The Hugh Thompson cousins made a sightseeing tour of nearby Domremy, the birthplace of Joan of Arc. With regret, HST Infantry left the "hospitable flyers, who took the dangers of their job with such elan" and was returned to the hospital by Hugh and Pat in the squadron Cadillac.²³⁴

²³³ Thompson, Hugh S., *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*, p. 145.

²³⁴ Thompson, Hugh S., *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*, p. 144-145.

CHAPTER 18

RETURN TO THE AIR WAR

Two missions were flown on August 15th, 1918. However, Hugh did not fly on either of them. It may be that the shrapnel wound to his cheek he received the day before was a bit more than the “scratch” described in the report, much as Virgil Hower’s compound fracture of his arm was described as “not serious” after his crash flying with Codman a couple of weeks earlier.

The mission to bomb the railroad yards at Dommary-Baroncourt left the field at 10:25 a.m.

Pilots

Arthur Alexander
Pat Anderson
Capt. James Summersett
Charles Codman
Cecil Young
Manvel Davis
Bruce Hopper – Camera

Observers

Pennington Way
Elisha Evans
Ralph Coryell
James O’Toole
Ralph Anspach
Avrome Hexter
Arthur Kelly

Davis and Hexter were forced to turn back due to their inability to keep pace with the formation. Six aircraft continued to the clearly visible target. Thirty-four 20-kilo (1499 pounds) bombs were dropped making direct hits on the tracks and cutting the central and southern portions of the yards. Numerous bursts were seen among the railroad storehouses and machine shops.

Anti-aircraft fire was inaccurate but continued through the flight over enemy territory. One enemy aircraft, thought to be a Rumpler biplane, followed the formation from Verdun to the objective and back to the lines. It fired about 100 rounds but never closed in.

The mission returned to Amanty at 12:55 p.m. Manvel Davis, who had turned back early, made a poor landing breaking a section of the fuselage. Captain Summersett landed hard and broke his

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undercarriage.

The second mission, which left at 4:30 p.m., went to the railroad yards at Conflans.

Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Thomas Farnsworth
Bradley Gaylord
Lewis Turnbull
Charles Codman
Cecil Young
Belmont Beverly
Arthur Alexander

Observers

Howard Rath
Robert E. Thompson
Warren Pressler
Arthur Cawston
James O'Toole
Ralph Anspach
Frank Newbury
J. C. E. McLennan

The teams of Turnbull and Cawston, as well as Beverly and Newbury, turned back before crossing the lines. The Thomas Farnsworth and Robert Thompson team made a forced landing at nearby Gondrecourt. The remaining five bombers carried on to the target. Visibility was fair allowing them to drop twenty 20-kilo (882 pounds) bombs scoring eighteen direct hits on the eastern portion of the railroad yards and two direct hits on the roundhouse.

Anti-aircraft fire was inaccurate. On the way to the target German aircraft were seen taking off and climbing. When the Americans turned for home after the bombing, eleven of the German fighters were at their altitude. They had white tails and "ugly mottled brown and yellow fuselages" according to Codman and were thought to be Albatrosses. The enemy aircraft attacked over Puxieux, six miles south of Conflans. Six of the enemy were unable to keep up but five gave "hot combat to the lines."

Codman later recalled that the tactics of the attacking aircraft were poor in comparison to the really good pilots they would meet in the air in the coming weeks. These enemy flyers would dive and swoop with bursts of machine-gun fire at long range. The American observers kept them at bay with heavy defensive fire from a tight formation.

One enemy fighter flew in close, with gun blazing, behind Gundelach where the tail would prevent Pinky Way from firing. Gundie kicked his rudder skidding to one side, and Way shot the German down leaving a trail of smoke behind.

The mission returned at 6:45 p.m. and made some rough landings according to Codman, who made a rough one himself. The mission

report stated that Cecil Young's plane was "riddled with bullets" while Arthur ("Sheep" to his friends) Alexander and Bradley Gaylord required new propellers. Gundie's airplane needed new rudder controls, new drag wires, and new brace wires in the landing carriage. Codman noticed his friend limping and asked if he was stiff. Gundie replied that he had been hit by a spent bullet.²³⁵

Until this latest mission, the 96th had been enjoying the excitement of the war, but their own adventures had been somewhat less than death-defying. Theirs was a strange, detached, war on the periphery. They, of course, did not fly every day. On flying days, they would pass over the lines into enemy territory, observe the scorched earth of the trenches below, and be fired at by usually inaccurate anti-aircraft fire. The few enemy pursuit planes they had seen had kept their distance and were not a mortal threat.

It was an odd war for the airmen always returning from their missions to beds, cooked food, dry clothes and visits to the local watering holes for entertainment. Theirs was not the life in the trenches with massive artillery shelling, deep and endless mud, cooties, trench foot, poison gas, assaults "over the top" and the stench of death.

The August 16th mission left the airdrome at 4:55 p.m. to bomb the railway station and yards at Dommery-Baroncourt. It is surmised that the visit from Hugh's cousin, HST Infantry, began on the morning of this day, as the weather and one afternoon mission he described in his reminiscences fit this time period.

Pilots

David Young
Andre Gundelach
Thomas Farnsworth
Belmont Beverly
Capt. James Summersett
Bruce Hopper – camera
Manvel Davis
Pat Anderson
Lewis Turnbull

Observers

Samuel Lunt
Pennington Way
Bob Thompson
Frank Newbury
Ralph Coryell
Arthur Kelly
Avrome Hexter
Hugh Thompson
Arthur Cawston

Thomas Farnsworth and Bob Thompson returned to Amanty

²³⁵ Codman, *Contact*, p. 56-57. Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 40-41.

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before crossing the lines. The remainder of the flight continued on to Dommery-Baroncourt dropping forty-eight 20-kilo (2116 pounds) bombs through poor visibility at the railroad yard. Results were not very successful as only five bombs hit the railroad. One pilot noted in his diary that they “missed the target a mile.”²³⁶

Anti-aircraft was active and accurate throughout the mission over enemy territory. It was noticed that some of the anti-aircraft bursts were peculiar in that they had both black and white smoke. The mission returned at 7:10 p.m. There were now eleven planes on hand with nine available for duty. Fourteen pilots and sixteen observers were available.²³⁷

There were no missions and only one test flight on August 17th due to the weather. Conditions improved on the 18th allowing a flight to test a camera and nine other aircraft, leaving at 5:30 a.m., to raid the railroad yards at Longuyon. However, weather and visibility deteriorated and the mission was aborted returning at 6:30 a.m. Again, on the 19th the weather was poor and only one test flight was made.

A bombing mission took off at 5:05 p.m. on the afternoon of August 20th with the intent to attack the railroad station and yards at Longuyon.

Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Thomas Farnsworth
Pat Anderson
Charles Codman
Belmont Beverly
Raymond Taylor
Lewis Turnbull

Observers

Pennington Way
Robert Thompson
Hugh Thompson
James O'Toole
Frank Newbury
Avrome Hexter
Arthur Cawston

All planes crossed the lines, but the objective was covered by clouds. Bombs were dropped northwest of Longuyon at Flabeuville. Forty-four 20-kilo and four 45-kilo (2336 pounds) bombs were dropped on railroad tracks southeast of town. Five bursts were observed on the tracks. The visibility was poor. Anti-aircraft fire was light due to the clouds. The mission returned to Amanty at 7:20

²³⁶ Suddaby, Stephen, *Suddaby Western Front Bombing Database*.

²³⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 41-41.

p.m.²³⁸

The mission log records no raids on August 20th. However, 96th squadron pilot and historian Bruce Hopper wrote in his *When the Air Was Young* that on August 20th there was a raid on Conflans which “destroyed forty German airplanes in box cars and killed fifty workmen and soldiers.”²³⁹ The source of this detailed information is unknown.

There were two bombing missions on August 21st. Hugh flew both of them. The first mission took off at 10 a.m. to bomb the railroad yards at Longuyon.

The 1st Mission was flown by:

Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Bradley Gaylord
David Young
Bruce Hopper
Capt. James Summersett
Manvel Davis
Cecil Young
Pat Anderson

Observers

Howard Rath
Warren Pressler
Elisha Evans
Arthur Kelly
Ralph Coryell
Donald Warner
Ralph Anspach
Hugh Thompson

The teams of Captain Summersett and Ralph Coryell; and Pat Anderson and Hugh Thompson; and Bruce Hopper and Arthur Kelly dropped out of the formation before crossing the lines. The remaining aircraft took advantage of excellent visibility and bombed the target effectively. Twenty-four 45-kilo and eight 20-kilo (2733 pounds) bombs hit “well bunched on yards between station and locomotive repair shop.”

Anti-aircraft fire was light and inaccurate except at Longuyon where it was accurate. The mission returned at 12:30 p.m.

The second mission on the 21st left at 3:55 p.m. to bomb the railroad yards at Audun-le-Roman, sixty miles north of Amanty, the most distant target to date. Using a different aircraft than they had in the morning, Hugh and Pat Anderson successfully completed this mission.

²³⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 42.

²³⁹ Hopper, *When the Air Was Young*, p. 8.

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Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Bradley Gaylord
Belmont Beverly
Thomas Farnsworth
Capt. James Summersett
Charles Codman
Pat Anderson
Lewis Turnbull – Camera
Bruce Hopper

Observers

Pennington Way
Elisha Evans
Frank Newbury
Bob Thompson
Ralph Coryell
James O'Toole
Hugh Thompson
Arthur Cawston
Arthur Kelly

The teams of Gaylord and Evans; and Summersett and Coryell dropped out before crossing the lines. The remaining seven planes reached the target with good visibility. They dropped sixteen 45-kilo and eight 20-kilo (1940 pounds) bombs scoring three direct hits on the tracks on the eastern end of the yard. Anti-aircraft fire was light through the mission. They returned to Amanty at 6:20 p.m.²⁴⁰

Hugh Thompson did not fly the mission of August 22nd, which took off at 9:55 to bomb the railroad yards at Conflans.

Pilots

David Young
Andre Gundelach
Bradley Gaylord
Capt. James Summersett
Thomas Farnsworth
Charles Codman
Bruce Hopper
Cecil Young
Raymond Taylor

Observers

Samuel Lunt
Elisha Evans
Warren Pressler
Ralph Coryell
Bob Thompson
James O'Toole
Arthur Kelly
Ralph Anspach
William Stuart

Captain Summersett and Ralph Coryell never left the ground at Amanty. Cecil Young and Ralph Anspach dropped out before crossing the lines. The remaining seven aircraft reached the objective. The visibility was good. They dropped twenty-six 20-kilo and twelve 50-kilo (2469 pounds) bombs. Ten direct hits were observed on the central part of the yard. North of Freanes an enemy biplane fired one burst at the last plane in the formation and then continued westward.

²⁴⁰ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 43.

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The type of aircraft was not identified. Two successful photographic exposures were made over the target. The mission returned at 12:20 p.m. Eleven aircraft were on hand, nine available for duty. Fifteen pilots and seventeen observers were available for duty.²⁴¹

There were two missions on August 23rd. Hugh Thompson flew on the first. Both missions were to bomb the railroad yard at Conflans. The first mission left the airdrome at 9:45 a.m.

Pilots

Bradley Gaylord
Andre Gundelach
Belmont Beverly
Capt. Summersett
Thomas Farnsworth
Pat Anderson
Lewis Turnbull
Manvel Davis
Cecil Young

Observers

Howard Rath
Pennington Way
Frank Newbury
Ralph Coryell
Bob Thompson
Hugh Thompson
Arthur Cawston
Donald Warner
Ralph Anspach

Gundie Gundelach and Pinky Way dropped out before crossing the lines. When the remaining eight bombers reached the objective, the visibility was fair. Twenty 20-kilo and sixteen 50-kilo (2645 pounds)²⁴² bombs were dropped from 4200 meters (13,780 feet). Five hits were observed on the northern and western end of the yards. One hit on a warehouse.

Anti-aircraft fire was light and inaccurate. One enemy aircraft of unidentified type was seen going southeast over Ginerey. Three pursuit planes started from somewhere south of Conflans just after bombs were dropped. They attempted to climb up through the squadron formation but gave up the chase over Braquis and returned east towards Conflans.

Five photographic exposures were made over the target; four were successful. The mission returned at 11:45 am.

The second mission to Conflans left at 4 p.m.

²⁴¹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 43-34.

²⁴² The operations report, Gorrell series E, vol. 14, p. 44 has a typographical error erroneously indicating 30 kilo bombs were dropped. The Operations Report, Gorrell, series E, vol. 14, p. 100 has it correct; they were 50 kilo bombs.

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Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Thomas Farnsworth
Dave Young
Charles Codman
Manvel Davis
Raymond Taylor
Cecil Young
Bruce Hopper

Observers

Pennington Way
Elisha Evans
Samuel Lunt
James O'Toole
Donald Warner
William Stuart
Avrome Hexter
Arthur Kelly

The teams of Cecil Young and Avrome Hexter; and Manvel Davis and Donald Warner dropped out before crossing the lines. The remaining six aircraft reached the objective only to find the visibility was poor. Twenty-two 20-kilo and ten 50-kilo (2072 pounds) bombs were dropped. The bombs landed short, to the northeast, of the railroad yards.

Anti-aircraft fire was accurate and active, particularly at Conflans. No enemy aircraft were sighted. One photographic exposure was made but it was unsuccessful. The mission returned to Amanty at 6:20 pm.²⁴³

There were no flights of any kind on August 24th as there were occasional showers and poor visibility. Thirteen planes were on hand, six available for duty. Fifteen pilots and seventeen observers were available.

Two missions were flown on August 25th. Hugh Thompson flew on both missions. The first mission was, once again, to Conflans. Take off was 9:20 a.m.

Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Capt. James Summersett
Bradley Gaylord
Belmont Beverly
Bruce Hopper – Camera
Lewis Turnbull
Pat Anderson
Manvel Davis
Raymond Taylor

Observers

Howard Rath
Ralph Coryell
Warren Pressler
Frank Newbury
Arthur Kelly
Arthur Cawston
Hugh Thompson
Donald Warner
William Stuart

²⁴³ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 44-45, p. 100.

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The teams of Pat Anderson and Hugh Thompson; and Manvel Davis and Don Warner dropped out before crossing the lines. The remaining seven bombers reached the objective. Visibility was good and they dropped twenty-eight 20-kilo and twelve 50-kilo (2557 pounds) bombs from an altitude of 4200 meters (13,780 feet). All bursts were bunched at the eastern part of the yard. One explosion on the tracks was apparently a railcar of ammunition. There was one burst on the northern end of the roundhouse. As usual, the route was via Verdun. Anti-aircraft fire was accurate at Conflans, but light and inaccurate throughout the route over enemy territory. Two enemy aircraft followed the formation at a distance from Conflans to the lines. The mission returned at 11:40 a.m.

The second mission left the airdrome at 3:00 p.m. to bomb the railroad yards at Longuyon.

Pilots

Dave Young
Thomas Farnsworth
Bradley Gaylord
Charles Codman
Capt. Summersett
Pat Anderson
Edmond Bates
Raymond Taylor

Observers

Pennington Way
Bob Thompson
Samuel Lunt
James O'Toole
Ralph Coryell
Hugh Thompson
Avrome Hexter
William Stuart

Bradley Gaylord and Sam Lunt made a forced landing at Neufchateau. The flight leaders Dave Young and Pinky Way were hit by anti-aircraft fire just before reaching the target and were forced to return to Amanty. Tom Farnsworth and Bob Thompson took over the number one position in the formation. Seven bombers reached the objective. The visibility was good. Twenty-six 20-kilo and twelve 50-kilo (2469 pounds) bombs were dropped from an altitude of 4200 meters (13,780 feet). Bombs hit short of the objective and struck northeast of the railroad yards. Anti-aircraft fire was active at Longuyon.

Two photographic exposures were successfully made over the objective. The mission returned at 5:20 p.m. Thirteen aircraft were on hand with nine available for duty. Fourteen pilots and sixteen

observers were available.²⁴⁴

There were no missions flown on August 26th, 27th, 28th and 29th due to cloudy skies making for poor visibility. During days when operations were impractical, the pilots and observers would gather at the Intelligence Office for systematic map drills to enhance their navigation. Identification of German aircraft was taught using silhouettes.²⁴⁵ In-depth discussions focused on the high-priority topic of the best type of formation to fly for defense against enemy scouts. Maneuvering of the formation to make it a more difficult target was a frequent subject of conversation.

The squadron engaged in a constant search for the best methodology to carry out their missions. As they were still the only American bombing squadron, they had to teach themselves the proper techniques and procedures. The squadron was in some ways operating in a vacuum and had to learn from its mistakes and would constantly seek ways to improve their efficiency and their safety through after-action discussions. A spirit to improve their performance led to good-natured competition among the airmen as to which pilot or observer could do the most to remedy problems or suggest new ways of carrying on their role in the air.²⁴⁶

One result of these discussions was the decision allowing the pilot to drop bombs rather than the observer. Only the leading and deputy leading observers' aircraft had bombsights; the rest of the observers had to keep an eye on the leading aircraft. When they saw the bombs drop then they too would drop their bombs.

In practice, however, the observers may have been watching enemy aircraft or reconnaissance and thus did not promptly drop their bomb load. And, with increasing enemy aircraft activity the observers needed to keep their heads swiveling as they scanned the skies on the lookout for danger.

The solution was to rig a dual bomb dropping mechanism for the pilot and shift responsibility to the pilot for watching the lead plane to determine when to drop the bombs. This additional responsibility fit with the pilot's need to watch the lead plane in order to stay in formation. This greatly increased the formation's bombing

²⁴⁴ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 45 and 101. The total weight of bombs is erroneously shown as 1220 kg on the squadron report, p. 45, rather than 1120 kg.

²⁴⁵ Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 160.

²⁴⁶ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 14.

accuracy.²⁴⁷

A two-seater aircraft, such as the Breguet was a formidable opponent for a single seat pursuit plane. Being restricted to firing only forward, a single seat pursuit plane would have to turn itself to shift the aim of the guns, which was a distinct disadvantage. The two-seater allowed the observer's twin machine guns to traverse a wide area of sky. A skilled bomber team could bank and turn the airplane instantly to allow firing in otherwise blind spots such as directly behind or areas obscured by a wing. The advantage shifted to the attacking aircraft when they could attack in groups, when the observer had multiple targets to engage at the same time, allowing one or more of the attackers to get good shots at the two-seater.

A defensive development was the installation of a tunnel gun below the observer that would allow firing at enemy aircraft behind and below, which was a blind spot. The initial shipment of tunnel guns from the Technical Branch of the Air Service incorporated a mounting that was unsatisfactory. As an in-field remedy, Captain Dave Young and Master Sergeant Grant designed an entirely original mounting that solved the problem.²⁴⁸ The tunnel guns were installed in October.

It was difficult to assess what damage, or disruption, the raids had caused the Germans. Photographic evidence was analyzed but very often the photos were unusable. Reports did come from the French Intelligence that the American bombers were causing terror to spread among the enemy troops as they fled into their dugouts long before the bombers reached their targets.²⁴⁹

On the 27th a new Breguet B2 was delivered. On the evening of August 29th there were fourteen aircraft on hand with eleven available for duty. Fourteen pilots and sixteen observers were listed as available for duty.²⁵⁰

The war was heating up for the 96th Squadron. Three missions were flown on August 30th. Hugh Thompson flew on all three.

The first mission left the airdrome at 5:15 a.m. to bomb the railroad yards at Conflans.

²⁴⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 11, 14.

²⁴⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 15, p. 10.

²⁴⁹ Hopper, *When the Air Was Young*, p. 8-9.

²⁵⁰ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 46.

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Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Thomas Farnsworth
Bradley Gaylord
Charles Codman
Capt. James Summersett
Bruce Hopper
Cecil Young
Edmond Bates
Pat Anderson

Observers

Howard Rath
Elisha Evans
Warren Pressler
James O'Toole
Ralph Coryell
Arthur Kelly
Avrome Hexter
Donald Warner
Hugh Thompson

All aircraft reached the objective. Visibility was poor which likely affected the bombing accuracy. Thirty-two 20-kilo and sixteen 50-kilo (3175 pounds) bombs were dropped at 7:20 a.m. from an altitude of 4000 meters (13,123 feet). This was the largest single raid, based on the weight of bombs dropped and the number of aircraft reaching the target, that the 96th Squadron had yet carried out. Regrettably, the bombs fell short, landing near the southern part of the railroad yard.

The anti-aircraft fire was accurate and active. The plane of Codman and O'Toole was hit by shrapnel, badly damaging the engine. They made a forced landing at Colombey-les-Belles, fifteen miles east of Amanty. The mission returned at 8 a.m.

The second mission of the day, to bomb the railroad yard at Longuyon, took off at 11:35 a.m.

Pilots

Dave Young
Andre Gundelach
Bradley Gaylord
Capt. James Summersett
Thomas Farnsworth
Cecil Young
Pat Anderson - Camera
Raymond Taylor
Manvel Davis

Observers

Pennington Way
Samuel Lunt
Warren Pressler
Ralph Coryell
Bob Thompson
Donald Warner
Hugh Thompson
William Stuart
Avrome Hexter

The teams of Gundle Gundelach and Sam Lunt, as well as that of Manvel Davis and Avrome Hexter, dropped out before reaching the lines. The remaining seven aircraft continued the mission. Due to

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high, contrary winds, the primary objective, Longuyon, was aborted and the secondary target, Dommary-Baroncourt, was attacked instead.

The visibility was poor. Forty-eight 20-kilo and four 50-kilo (2337 pounds) bombs were dropped. Results were excellent. All bursts were at the northern end of the yards, cutting the tracks at the neck. This would block railroad traffic, and it was hoped that follow-up raids would catch the bottled up trains. Eight explosions were observed among the cars and warehouses.

Anti-aircraft fire was active and fairly accurate at Dommary-Baroncourt. The raid was routed via Verdun. Hugh, manning the camera, made three successful photograph exposures over the target. The mission returned to the airdrome at 1:45 pm.

The third mission of the day left the airdrome at 5:00 p.m. to bomb the railroad yards at Conflans.

Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Dave Young
Thomas Farnsworth
Bradley Gaylord
Pat Anderson
Cecil Young
Capt. James Summersett
Raymond Taylor
Bruce Hopper
Manvel Davis

Observers

Howard Rath
Samuel Lunt
Bob Thompson
Elisha Evans
Hugh Thompson
Burger²⁵¹
Ralph Coryell
William Stuart
Arthur Kelly
A. T. Grier

The teams of James Summersett and Ralph Coryell; and Bradley Gaylord and Chick Evans; and Cecil Young and Burger; and Tom Farnsworth and Bob Thompson dropped out before crossing the lines. Six remaining aircraft reached the objective. Visibility was fair. Forty 20-kilo and two 50-kilo (1984 pounds) bombs were dropped from 4200 meters at 6:40 p.m. All bombs hit the tracks, "cutting a trail through the central portion of the yards, and six bursts were seen among buildings near the station."

Anti-aircraft fire was active and fairly accurate. Three enemy aircraft followed throughout the entire course behind the lines without

²⁵¹ No further identification of Burger. He is not found on the squadron roster.

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attacking. The mission returned at 7:20 p.m.²⁵² It was a long day for many airmen.

There was no flying on August 31st due to poor visibility and cloudy sky. Fourteen planes were on hand with twelve available for duty. Thirteen pilots and fifteen observers were available.

In summary, during August the squadron made twenty raids on the fourteen days weather allowed flying and dropped 21.1 tons of bombs.²⁵³ The cost was slight. The damaged aircraft could easily be repaired. The only injuries were Hugh Thompson, who received a scratch on the face, and Virgil Hower suffered a fractured arm. However, the cost was soon going to go up dramatically.

There was no flying on September 1st due to cloud cover and poor visibility.

Two missions were flown on September 2nd. The first was an attack on the railroad yards at Audun-le-Roman. The formation left Amanty at 9:35 a.m.

Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Bradley Gaylord
Thomas Farnsworth
Dave Young
Charles Codman
Cecil Young
Bruce Hopper – Camera
Arthur Alexander
Raymond Taylor

Observers

Pennington Way
Elisha Evans
Bob Thompson
Samuel Lunt
James O'Toole
Burger
Donald Warner
J. C. E. McLennan
William Stuart

The teams of Raymond Taylor and William Stewart; Tom Farnsworth and Bob Thompson; and Dave Young and Samuel Lunt all turned back prior to crossing the lines. The remaining six aircraft reached the objective. Perhaps due to poor visibility, all the bombs fell short, landing in a field northeast of the objective. The formation had dropped twenty-two 20-kilo and ten 50-kilo (2072 pounds) bombs.

Anti-aircraft fire was active but inaccurate. Four enemy aircraft of an unidentified type followed the formation from Conflans to the

²⁵² Gorrell, Series E, vol. 4 p. 46-47, 102-103.

²⁵³ Hopper, *When the Air Was Young*, p. 8.

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lines firing occasional bursts. At least one had a yellow tail. Ten photographic exposures were made over the objective, five of them were successful. Three 50-car trains were observed. The mission returned at noon.²⁵⁴

The second mission of the day left the airfield at 2:40 p.m. to bomb the railroad yards at Longuyon.

Pilots

Bradley Gaylord
Thomas Farnsworth
Arthur Alexander
Bruce Hopper – Camera
Cecil Young
Edmond Bates
Raymond Taylor
Capt. James Summersett
Pat Anderson

Observers

Howard Rath
Bob Thompson
J. C. E. McLennan
Arthur Kelly
Burger
Lake²⁵⁵
Samuel Lunt
Ralph Coryell
Hugh Thompson

The teams of Tom Farnsworth and Bob Thompson; and Arthur Alexander and J.C.E. McLennan dropped out before crossing the lines. The remaining seven aircraft reached Longuyon. Despite excellent visibility, the flight's bomb load fell short of the objective and landed east of the railroad yards. Twenty-eight 20-kilo and ten 50-kilo bombs (2,336 pounds) missed the target.

Anti-aircraft fire was light. Four enemy planes painted brown with white tails, thought to be Pfalz scouts, attacked the formation southeast of Longuyon and gave a running fight to the lines. Four planes were hit but the damage was slight. The mission returned at 5:20 p.m.²⁵⁶

During this mission, 350 railroad cars were seen at Longuyon as well as three locomotives with steam up. 300 cars were at Dommary-Baroncourt.²⁵⁷

September 3rd saw two more bombing missions. The first left the field at 5:40 a.m. to bomb the railroad yards at Longuyon.

²⁵⁴ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 106.

²⁵⁵ Bates's teammate, Lake, is unidentified. He does not appear on the 96th Squadron roster. Gorrell, Series N, vol. 16, p. 181-184.

²⁵⁶ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 47-48.

²⁵⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 105.

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Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Dave Young
Thomas Farnsworth
Arthur Alexander
Charles Codman
Cecil Young
Edmond Bates
Raymond Taylor
Pat Anderson

Observers

Pennington Way
Samuel Lunt
Bob Thompson
J. C. E. McLennan
James O'Toole
Donald Warner
Avrome Hexter
William Stuart
Hugh Thompson

The teams of Andre Gundelach and Pennington Way; and Tom Farnsworth and Bob Thompson dropped out before crossing the lines. Pat Anderson and Hugh Thompson developed engine trouble near Dommary-Baroncourt so dropped their bombs there before heading back across the lines.

The remaining six bombers reached Longuyon where they dropped their load from 4200 meters (13,780 feet). The seven aircraft together dropped thirty 20-kilo and fourteen 50-kilo (4,265 pounds) bombs. At Longuyon seven bursts were seen on the eastern end of the yard on tracks leading to Dommary-Baroncourt. Two bursts occurred on buildings northeast of repair shops. Two bursts were seen on locomotive repair shops. At Dommary-Baroncourt Pat Anderson and Hugh Thompson observed four bursts on the southern neck of the railroad yards and two bursts on buildings along the tracks, all from their bombs.

Anti-aircraft fire was active and accurate at Etain and Longuyon. One unidentified enemy biplane seen west of Dommary-Baroncourt did not attack. The mission returned at 8:10 a.m.

Eight trains were observed totaling 350 cars. In addition, eleven locomotives, with steam up, at Dommary-Baroncourt were seen along with fifty cars. Nine observation balloons were seen on the ground.²⁵⁸

The second mission on September 3rd left at 3:10 p.m. to bomb the railroad yard at Conflans.

Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Dave Young

Observers

Pennington Way
Samuel Lunt

²⁵⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 107.

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Thomas Farnsworth
Arthur Alexander
Raymond Taylor
Edmond Bates
Capt. James Summersett
Bruce Hopper

Bob Thompson
J. C. E. McLennan
William Stuart
Donald Warner
Ralph Coryell
Arthur Kelly

The teams of Bruce Hopper and Arthur Kelly; and Thomas Farnsworth and Bob Thompson dropped out before crossing the lines. The remaining aircraft continued to Conflans. They dropped twenty-two 20-kilo and twelve 50-kilo (2,293 pounds) bombs. The bombs all bunched well around the junction of the Conflans-Briey railroad and Conflans and Metz railroad. The bridge on the Conflans-Briey railroad was destroyed. There was an explosion with fire in a building north of the junction.

Anti-aircraft fire was heavy and accurate at Conflans. Five enemy scout planes painted green and brown with yellow tails, thought to be Phalz, persistently attacked from Friaucourt to Filirey. One was shot down in flames crashing between Hannonville and Laubeuville. The mission returned at 7:10 p.m.²⁵⁹

A great deal of train traffic was observed. Five 50-car troop trains were seen in motion. There were also about 300 cars at Dommery-Baroncourt, and 500 cars as well as a train with steam up at Conflans.²⁶⁰ All were wonderful bombing targets if only the Allies had the airpower to make the strikes.

Codman wrote about a conversation with Pat Anderson that took place on September 3rd:

There were a number of us who knew that he [Pat Anderson] could see things ahead. He did not do much predicting. Just as well perhaps. It was uncomfortable. He had foreseen the end of Clapp and the two English boys. Only last night he had said, with perfect cheerfulness, to Farnsworth, "Why do you keep talking about the end of the month? You won't be here the end of the month." "Is that so," Farnsworth had replied with spirit, "Well how about you?" "I'll be here longer than you," said Pat, and then added calmly, "But not until the

²⁵⁹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 48-49.

²⁶⁰ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 108.

end of the month.” Walking back to our shack I had said to him, “How about Gundelach?” “Not a chance,” replied Pat. It was morbid perhaps, but I could not help asking, “And what about me, Pat?” He hesitated before replying, “I can’t see why, but somehow I see you getting through.”²⁶¹

Pat’s prediction came true nine days later. Gundelach went down in flames, jumping from the doomed aircraft, on September 12th. Farnsworth was shot down on the 13th.

Being friends and teammates, one must assume that Hugh and Pat had discussed Pat’s strange psychic powers. It says a great deal about Pat Anderson that despite his uncanny foresight he continued doing his duty rather than seeking a transfer to non-flying status. And, if Hugh had such knowledge, even if second hand, he too stands apart from the average man.

The war was changing fast for the men of the 96th Squadron. The recent past had brought enemy aircraft into action against the bombers. Up until the present, the squadron could be described as belonging to a dangerous flying club that would only occasionally run into stiff enemy aircraft opposition.

But a transition had occurred. Now the attacking Germans were more highly skilled, aggressive and determined than had been experienced previously. Now the group faced a life and death struggle in the air.

The squadron was slow, fatally slow, to realize that to survive they needed much larger formations to provide sufficient defensive firepower. To do otherwise, as they soon realized, often resulted in a slaughter.²⁶² In the squadron’s defense, it must, however, be pointed out that they did not have the aircraft on hand to routinely send up formations of sufficient size for even minimal safety.

The September 4th mission would change the face of the war for the squadron in dramatic fashion. Any ideas about a return to the days of the squadron being much like an exciting yet dangerous flying club were banished for good. The mission was the usual attack on railroad yards. On this day it would be at Dommery-Baroncourt. The mission left the field at 10:50 a.m. and was expected back in a couple of hours.

²⁶¹ Codman, *Contact*, p. 77.

²⁶² Suddaby, Steve, *Aerial Bombing in World War I*, unpublished, 2019, p. 14.

DESTINY'S WINGS

Pilots

Andre Gundelach
Bradley Gaylord
Thomas Farnsworth
Capt. James Summersett
Arthur Alexander
Bruce Hopper
Cecil Young
Edmond Bates
Pat Anderson

Observers

Howard Rath
Elisha Evans
Bob Thompson
Ralph Coryell
John C. E. McLennan
Arthur Kelly
Donald Warner
Avrome Hexter
Hugh Thompson

Gaylord and Chick Evans dropped out of the formation before crossing the lines. The eight remaining aircraft continued to the target. The wind being very strong, flight leader Gundelach made the decision not to go on to Dommary-Baroncourt but to attack the railroad yard at Conflans instead. Thirty-four 20-kilo and twelve 50-kilo (2,822 pounds) bombs were dropped. Perhaps due to the wind the bombs fell short, landing north of the railway lines.

Anti-aircraft fire was active and accurate at Etain and Conflans. Far more troubling than the archie was the presence of ten enemy scout planes that attacked from Friaufville to Lamerville. Particularly disturbing was that the attack was well organized and persistent. The airmen believed that the aircraft were Pfalz and had red noses and white tails. Some had mottled brown fuselages. At least one had black wings, and another had a pennant shaped red triangle bordered with white on the fuselage.²⁶³

After dropping the bombs, Gundelach signaled to turn for home. He then noticed five Pfalz planes climbing for altitude. He immediately changed course and flew directly into the sun as his observer Howard Rath fired six red flares to signify "enemy planes, close in."

Gundelach knew from the coloring of the aircraft that they were from a high-quality squadron. The enemy tried repeatedly to break up the American formation by attacking from all sides. The observers beat off the attacks. It became a running fight with the enemy scouts diving in to fire their bursts, then zooming back to positions above and behind the formation. Finally, this group of five broke off the engagement.

²⁶³ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 49.

Three minutes later another group of five enemy scouts from the same squadron attacked. Again, the attack was highly organized and continued as far as the lines at Verdun where the enemy broke off the engagement. Hugh Thompson shot down one of the scouts in flames which crashed in the vicinity of Friaerville.²⁶⁴

Charles Codman did not participate in this mission but was waiting at the airfield when it returned. He saw the incoming aircraft at a distance and noticed that they were unusually scattered. Three were coming in at a high rate of speed. Gundelach, landing fast, rolled up almost to the hangars and called for a doctor to go to the aircraft of Bates, who landed with his observer, Hexter, badly bleeding from a bullet wound on his forehead.

At the same time, Cecil Young came in, tail high, and taxied rapidly up to the hangar. Don Warner, his observer had been shot through the hip breaking his femur.

Another plane landed in the middle of the field and stopped. The observer, John McLennan, was frantically pointing to the pilot's cockpit. However, the cockpit appeared to be empty. The pilot, Sheep Alexander, was found slumped forward on the stick, semi-conscious. Sheep had taken a bullet in his lower back and was desperately wounded. Despite his wounds, he was determined to get back to the airfield as McLennan had been seriously wounded in both legs.²⁶⁵

Later, Sheep Alexander wrote of this horrific combat:

We had just dropped our bombs on the railroad tracks when Boche machines began to appear from every side. The wind was such that we had to stay over there much longer than usual, which gave them a chance to come up at us. At first it was a fairly even scrap, but more and more of them kept coming on until you saw them wherever you looked. Once I looked down, and there was a gang more on the way up. We were in the back of the formation [as was Hugh Thompson and Pat Anderson] and things got hotter and hotter. They kept closing in and we gave them all we had, but it finally got

²⁶⁴ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 15. Thompson, Hugh S., *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*, p. 184. A letter from Hugh Thompson to his cousin (HST Infantry) mentions the action of Sept. 4th and writes, "I shot one of the Boches down in flames." Wyllie, Arthur, *Aerial Victories of World War I*, Lulu.com, 2017, p. 109. Hugh Thompson is credited with one victory which occurred on Sept. 4, 1918.

²⁶⁵ Codman, *Contact*, p. 66-78.

to be almost impossible to keep them off because they were so many.

They closed in on us as close as 30 to 50 yards at times, and you have no idea what a sensation it is to hold your formation and hear the Boche machine guns, from four to five planes, cracking at you, and see their tracer bullets flashing by your head and hear and feel them hitting the wings and fuselage. McLennan, my observer, kept after them all the time, tapping me on the shoulder as he wanted me to tip up to give him shots, until he finally collapsed with two bullets in one leg and one in the other. Almost at the same time a bullet went into my side. From then on the only thought I had was to get back...How I got there I don't know, but we finally got back to our own field and a safe landing before I went completely under, once more proving that the power of God is more powerful than that of evil.²⁶⁶

Arthur "Sheep" Alexander was awarded the D.S.C. for this action. Born in 1892, Alexander played on the University of Wisconsin football team where he graduated in 1914. In 1917 he graduated from Harvard's Graduate School of Landscape Architecture.²⁶⁷ John McLennan, born in 1891, was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania with a B.S. in Electrical Engineering.²⁶⁸ He had joined the squadron on July 18th just after the loss of Major Brown's flight.

After the casualties had been taken away to the hospital Gundelach was asked about the attack. He believed the aircraft were part of the Richthofen Flying Circus and that they were very good coming in as close as twenty yards. The fight had begun long before reaching the target and continued all the way back to the lines.²⁶⁹ This was a strong, and ominous, statement coming as it did from Andre Gundelach. He was not only the most experienced combat pilot of the squadron, he was also assertive, self-confident and mature beyond his 23 years. For the 96th Squadron, the air war had dramatically changed.

The squadron history written by pilots Bruce Hopper and Dave

²⁶⁶ Ticknor, *New England Aviators*, p. 132.

²⁶⁷ Ticknor, *New England Aviators*, p. 103.

²⁶⁸ Ticknor, *New England Aviators*, p. 142.

²⁶⁹ Codman, *Contact*, p. 79.

Young commented, perhaps over-optimistically, that the battle was highly victorious for the 96th, one enemy plane was brought down yet there were no fatal casualties in the squadron. The incident served greatly to diminish the fear of the fast enemy scouts, as they had been met and defeated in a forty-minute combat, with the advantage of numbers in their favor.²⁷⁰

One must surely suspect that the airmen, confronted by multiple enemy aircraft firing machine guns as close as twenty yards, would not agree that the incident would diminish their fears. These were brave young men who may have felt, at least somewhat, invincible, but such an encounter would likely have greatly increased their anxieties. In fact, Sheep Alexander wrote, "Not only were men killed and wounded, but the strain of the work and conditions in the Squadron were such that many men were unable to stand it."²⁷¹

Hugh was in this hot action, shot down one enemy plane in flames, and lived to fight another day. However, close air combat surely took its toll on him and the others.

Royal Flying Corps pilot Cecil Lewis, flying pursuit planes in combat, wrote that:

Nobody could stand the strain indefinitely, ultimately it reduced you to a dithering state, near to imbecility. For always you had to fight it down, you had to go out and do the job, you could never admit it, never say frankly: 'I am afraid. I can't face it any more.' For cowardice, [as] it is the most common human emotion, is the most despised.²⁷²

The 96th did learn the valuable lesson that to fly straight and level was to court disaster. Maintaining a tight formation while performing evasive maneuvers was essential as it allowed the observers to fire when otherwise the tail or wing may have been covering the enemy. It also made the formation itself a more difficult target for the enemy. These lessons may seem extremely basic, but it must be remembered

²⁷⁰ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 16.

²⁷¹ Ticknor, *New England Aviators*, p. 129.

²⁷² Lewis, Cecil, *Sagittarius Rising*, originally published 1936, (London: Greenhill Books, 2006), p. 66.

that the squadron was learning on the job. There were no instructions or guides to follow. These men were almost entirely on their own in the new world of aerial combat. And, their prior experiences had not included such aggressive attacks by enemy aircraft.

Rain and dense clouds washed out flying any missions on September 5th through the 11th. The ground crew used the time to repair and service the shot up aircraft. By the evening of the 11th, there were twenty planes on hand with seventeen available for service. Replacement aircrew brought the number of available pilots up to seventeen with eighteen observers.

A week of rain turned the field at Amanty into a sea of mud. That mud caused human casualties. It was understood that large formations could defend themselves far better from attacking enemy aircraft than could small formations. The mud from the field would be thrown up by the tires of the aircraft into the wooden propellers causing the propellers to break during take-off. The aircraft with broken propellers were, of course, unable to continue with the mission thus reducing the size of the bombing formation. The smaller formation, caused by the mud on the field, was less able to defend itself, which often resulted in high casualties.²⁷³

²⁷³ Hopper, *When the Air Was Young*, p. 14.

CHAPTER 19
THE ST. MIHIEL OFFENSIVE
SEPTEMBER 12-16, 1918

The St. Mihiel Offensive began with a huge Allied artillery barrage at 2 a.m. September 12th, ahead of the U.S. infantry advance that began at 5 a.m. The roar could easily be heard at Amanty, and the horizon, despite the clouds, was lit up by distant flashes much like continuous heat lightning.

It was a day of bad weather and horror. The responding German artillery, as well as rifles, machine-guns, mortars, and grenades, were pounding the American infantry, making their advance through the mud, darkness, and rain a nightmare.

HST Infantry, now recently recovered from his wound, was back with his old outfit, Company L, 168th Infantry, 42nd Division. He was in the spearhead advancing north from a position a few miles north of the town of Flirey. At about 6 a.m. HST Infantry was very seriously wounded.²⁷⁴ After a few hours, he was picked up by stretcher bearers and agonizingly carried to the rear. He eventually ended up in a hospital, one of many that he would have to endure as he suffered through innumerable operations in the coming months and years. Of course, Hugh was unaware of his cousin's latest, and most severe, wound.

In the air, ominously, was evidence that the German air units were being reinforced by four crack squadrons flying the excellent Fokker D.VII's.

The First Day Bombardment Group was created on September 12th. Major James L. Dunsworth, formerly in command of the 96th, was to command the Group consisting of the 96th, 20th, and 11th Aero Squadrons, and Flight "A" of the 648th Squadron. Captain James A. Summersett, Jr. was given command of the 96th. The group would continue to operate from the Amanty airdrome until September 23rd when the First Day Bombardment Group would move to Maulan, near

²⁷⁴ "Cited for Gallantry," *Chattanooga News* [Chattanooga, TN], December 6, 1918, p. 12.

Ligny-en-Barrois, in preparation for the Argonne Offensive.²⁷⁵

Operationally nothing really changed for the 96th as the other squadrons flew DH-4s²⁷⁶ and not Breguets. Because the two aircraft types flew at different speeds they would not be merged together on missions. However, the 96th did lose two valuable and experienced pilots. 1st Lt. Thornton Hooper had been given command of the 11th Squadron on August 10th, and 1st Lt. Cecil Sellers was given command of the 20th squadron on August 14th.²⁷⁷

Sharing the airdrome with other squadrons offered opportunities not only to meet other airmen but also, like all flyers, to tell of their adventures in the air. Few stories could top that of 20th squadron pilot 1st Lt. Samuel P. Mandell and observer 1st Lt. Gardiner H. Fiske. These two, over a year before while training at Clermont, had an accident that may be truly unique. It was June 17, 1917 when Mandell made an unexpected maneuver that caught his observer Gardiner Fiske completely by surprise. Fiske, not wearing his safety belt or harness, was tossed into the air and entirely out of the cockpit. Miraculously, he came down on the rear of the aircraft just forward of the tail. Mandell immediately jerked his head around as the plane was suddenly tail heavy to see Fiske astride the fuselage. Mandell throttled down to reduce the air pressure on Fiske, who crawled across the top of the fuselage, breaking finger and toe holds into the fabric skin until he finally dropped into the cockpit headfirst.²⁷⁸

The 96th Squadron history records that:

September 12th, which opened the great St. Mihiel offensive, was on all counts the worst flying day in many months. A terrific southwest wind made formation flying extremely dangerous, and the low fast-moving clouds made it impossible to see more than two or three kilometers [1.2 to 1.8 miles]. In the morning the cloud ceiling was very low ... the first mission undertaken was

²⁷⁵ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 19.

²⁷⁶ The De Havilland DH-4 carried only half the bombload of the Breguet and was equipped with the British Wimperis bombsight which was not as effective as the 7th A.I.C. bombsight. Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 160.

²⁷⁷ Hudson, *Hostile Skies*, p. 130.

²⁷⁸ Codman, *Contact*, p. 11, 12 and 53. While Codman relates the story, he did not witness it as it happened before he was at Clermont-Ferrand. Gorrell, Series J, vol. 7, p. 219, 221 confirms the remarkable story.

a solo raid by 1st Lieut. Andre H. Gundelach, pilot, and 2nd Lieut. Pennington H. Way, observer, who left the airdrome at 10:45 a.m.²⁷⁹

There is more, much more, to this first mission of the day than recorded officially.

Charles Codman, who was present as a witness on the field at Amanty, wrote that at 9 a.m. it was announced that a large concentration of enemy troops had been observed at Buxieres. Andre Gundelach's flight was ordered to stand by for a low altitude bombing and strafing raid on the town not later than 10 o'clock. Airmen stood around anxiously watching the weather and talking among themselves. No one thought they would fly due to the wind and visibility. And, the weather was not getting better.

Gundelach remarked that they would not be able to fly until the weather broke, adding that to fly in the bad weather would be to waste airplanes and men. He was told that he was to fly the mission as ordered. Gundelach stalked into the Operations Building to see the Commanding Officer²⁸⁰ and closed the door behind him.

When Gundelach came out of the Operations Building, he walked straight to his aircraft without speaking or looking at anyone. His observer, Pennington "Pinky" Way, was waiting. Gundelach spoke rapidly to Way. Way climbed into the rear cockpit. Gundelach then ordered more bombs loaded onto the aircraft. After the armament crew stepped back, Gundelach called for more bombs. Bombs were added until all the racks were filled. The plane was loaded with thirty-two 90-mm personnel bombs, a record load for a Breguet in the fairest of weather.²⁸¹ Each 90-mm personnel bomb weighed 9.2 kilos (20.3 pounds), thirty-two bombs would weigh 294.4 kilos (649 pounds). The Breguet was overloaded by about 30 percent.

The engine was started. Gundelach, unsmiling, told the pilots and observers to wait for him and Way to return. Way, who had recently

²⁷⁹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 16.

²⁸⁰ It is not clear who was Commanding Officer at this moment. James Summersett was to take over as C.O. on September 12th from Major James Dunsforth, who was to transfer on September 12th to take command of the First Day Bombardment Group. The First Day Bombardment Group, of course, was located at Amanty so very likely both officers were on site. Codman, in *Contact* p. 80, refers to the "new" Commanding Officer which would indicate Summersett.

²⁸¹ Codman, *Contact*, p. 81-83. Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 16, 50.

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written his wife to say that so far he had lived “a charmed life”, grinned and waved a hand as they slowly moved across the flying field which was a sea of mud. After an agonizingly long take-off roll, the plane lumbered into the sky and disappeared into the thick weather.^{282 283}

The second mission of the day took off at 1:30 p.m. Gundelach and Way had not yet returned. The wind was still high, but the visibility was better. The objective was Buxerulles to bomb the town, as well as to strafe troops, vehicles, and targets of opportunity.

Pilots

Dave Young
Thomas Farnsworth
Belmont Beverly
Charles Codman
Edmond Bates
Cecil Young
Bruce Hopper
R. P. Elliott
Harold J. Forshay

Observers

Samuel Lunt
Bob Thompson²⁸⁴
Frank Newbury
Elisha Evans
Warren Pressler
John H. Smith
Arthur Kelly
Arthur C. Ellis
Paul J. O'Donnell

Codman described the air as very rough, and the formation was tossed around. Dark clouds were above and below. The wind was from the south and they passed over a deserted St. Mihiel at less than 1000 meters (3,280 feet). He noticed that the roads were strewn with guns, artillery caissons, and equipment of all kinds dropped by the retreating Germans. The formation dropped two hundred forty-eight 9.2-kilo anti-personnel bombs and sixteen 20-kilo (5,735 pounds, total) bombs at an altitude of a few hundred meters.

These nine aircraft were grossly overloaded, averaging 637 pounds per plane. Perhaps Gundelach proved that an overloaded aircraft could get off the muddy field; so others were loaded in a similar manner. The airplanes were close enough to the ground when their bombs exploded that they bounced in the air from the

²⁸² Codman, *Contact*, p. 81-84.

²⁸³ *Pennsylvania: A Record of the University's Men in the Great War* (n.p. 1920) p. 36 for “charmed life” quote.

²⁸⁴ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14 p. 50 indicates that Hugh Thompson was flying as observer with Farnsworth. Bob Thompson was Farnsworth's usual teammate. It is certain that Bob Thompson flew this mission rather than Hugh. Codman, *Contact*, p. 85 mentions Bob Thompson flying with Farnsworth on this mission.

concussion.²⁸⁵

Infantry were seen below. The formation dove and Codman fired a burst from his Vickers machine-gun. He then zoomed up, and Evans fired at the scattering infantrymen with his twin Lewis guns. The Germans ineffectively fired rifles back at them. Codman and Evans saw Thiaucourt and Xammes burning. As they crossed the lines they saw a crashed plane in no-man's land. There was no anti-aircraft fire nor enemy aircraft. The Germans were retreating.

Upon landing, Codman went to the Operations Office where he found a notice on the bulletin board advising that shortly after noon Andre Gundelach and Pennington Way crashed in flames near Commercy. Gundie jumped to his death, his body was found away from the wreckage of the plane. Pinky Way was burned to death. No bombs were found in the wreckage; so it was presumed that the mission had been accomplished.²⁸⁶

Shortly before he was killed Pinky Way wrote, "I have a wild devil for a pilot [Gundelach] . We will either get all the decorations or the sod, I guess. We get to look on death as a matter of course and after two or three close calls you almost feel as though you were living on borrowed time or as each breath you draw being that much velvet."²⁸⁷

It is noteworthy to consider that Way wrote these lines before the squadron faced the high casualties of the St. Mihiel offensive. In fact, Way and Gundelach were the first members of the 96th Squadron to be killed by enemy action.

Pilot David H. Young related that Gundelach and Way may have been shot down when they flew up to a French squadron and attached themselves to that unit for mutual protection. The French may have been disturbed seeing the newcomers flying a Breguet with the 96th insignia thinking it was Germans flying a captured Breguet. Not taking any chances the French shot them down.²⁸⁸ This friendly fire story has not been confirmed.

Gundelach and Way received the Distinguished Service Cross for this action. The citation notes that "they successfully bombed their objective, but while returning were attacked by eight enemy planes.

²⁸⁵ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 50. Codman, *Contact*, p. 85-86.

²⁸⁶ Codman, *Contact*, p. 86-87.

²⁸⁷ *Pennsylvania: A Record of the University's Men in the Great War* (n.p. 1920) p. 14.

²⁸⁸ Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 155-168.

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Their plane was brought down in flames....”²⁸⁹ There is no source for the “eight enemy planes.”

A third mission was attempted. However, the formation lost $\frac{3}{4}$ of its aircraft due to propellers broken by mud being thrown from the wheels on the take-off roll. The mission was aborted.²⁹⁰ This aborted mission is not mentioned in the squadron history in Gorrell.

There was a fourth mission on September 12th.²⁹¹ The target was troops at the town of Vigneulles. It was scheduled to take off at 5 p.m., but around 4 p.m. four Salmson observation planes, lost and low on fuel, came in for a landing. The wind was blowing fiercely. One pilot made a poor landing crashing into two of the eight Breguets lined up in front of the hangars while being readied for the mission. Fortunately, the Breguets' bombs did not explode. The three other Salmsons slithered through the mud on landing and broke their propellers.²⁹² It was that kind of day.

It was 6:30 p.m. before the formation, now reduced to five Breguets, took off for Vigneulles. Sunset was only a half hour away. It would be an understatement to say that it was a very worried group of airmen who took to the windy, cloudy and rapidly darkening skies, knowing that the cardinal rule for daylight flying was never to be caught in the air after dark. Nevertheless, the sun set while they were still approaching the target.

Pilots

Capt. James Summersett
Lewis Turnbull
Stephen Hopkins
Edward M. Cronin
Paul E. Lakin

Observers

Avrome Hexter
Arthur Cawston
Bertram Williams
Lyman C. Bleecker
Charles Douglas

The teams of Hopkins and Williams; Cronin and Bleecker; and Lakin and Douglas were new replacements having arrived within the past week. This was their first mission.

Darkness had fallen by the time they reached the objective at about 7:35 p.m. One hundred ten 9.2-kilo and twenty 8-kilo (2,583 pounds,

²⁸⁹ Gordon, *Lafayette Flying Corps*, p. 190-191.

²⁹⁰ Hopper, *When the Air Was Young*, p. 16.

²⁹¹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 50. Gorrell refers to this mission as the 3rd of the day.

²⁹² Hudson, *Hostile Skies*, p. 156.

517 pounds per plane) bombs were dropped on the northern part of Vigneulles and the road to Hatten Chatel. Due to the darkness, no results were observed other than that Vigneulles was seen burning at 7:40 p.m. Steve Hopkins wrote his father that night, "I have never seen such a sight in my life. The whole country was one mass of flames, where the Germans were in retreat. You could see the flashes of the guns, and the anti-aircraft occasionally broke around us."²⁹³

The return to Amanty in the darkness must have been horrific. None of the pilots had been trained in night flying nor the all-important skill of landing in the dark. Also, none of them, not even the two experienced teams, had seen the terrain in the dark, making navigation nearly impossible.

Hopkins wrote,

It was pitch dark and we flew for a long time on a straight course that we knew would ultimately take us over the lines. We finally recognized a river that we knew was in France. So far so good. The next question was how to find a good field or our own field to land on. Of course, all lights are out in this country and consequently there were very few landmarks. The moon finally came out,²⁹⁴ and by the aid of this we were able to follow rivers and the shapes of certain forest, and finally, in the direction of our field, we saw some flares. Three of the machines smashed in landing...I was the only one who did not damage a machine.²⁹⁵

It was about 8:30 p.m. when the first plane came in, dug into the mud, and upended. The second slipped around tearing off a wheel before stopping. The third flipped over on its back. The fourth, flown by Steve Hopkins, made a good landing.²⁹⁶ They were extraordinarily lucky to get back on the ground without suffering more losses.

The fifth airplane, that of Edward Cronin and Lyman Bleecker, did not find Amanty and crashed in a plowed field near Gondrecourt.

²⁹³ Ticknor, *New England Aviators*, p. 134.

²⁹⁴ Hopkins must have meant that the moon came out from the clouds as it had risen at about 1:30 that afternoon. It was a 1st quarter moon meaning that half the moon was illuminated. The moon would set about 10 p.m. placing it fairly low in the western sky. <https://www.timeanddate.com/moon/phases/france/nancy?year=1918> accessed Sept. 9, 2019.

²⁹⁵ Ticknor, *New England Aviators*, p. 134.

²⁹⁶ Codman, *Contact*, p. 88-89. Gorrell, *Series E*, vol. 14, p. 50.

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Bleecker was uninjured. However, pilot Ed Cronin, the Princeton man, was killed instantly.

Later that day, the Intelligence Officer informed Codman that his observer, Jim O'Toole, who had been on temporary detached duty as an observer for a Headquarters courier plane, had been shot down in flames.²⁹⁷ O'Toole had lived with Codman in the same hut as Hugh and Pat Anderson. By any definition, September 12th was a very bad day for the 96th Aero Squadron.

Having dinner while facing empty chairs that had only yesterday been filled with joking and laughing men was difficult. They were gone. In a few days or a week, new laughing and joking men would fill those seats. Sometimes the chairs would soon be empty again. Losing an experienced man such as Gundelach made even invincible young men feel cold fear. To go on required real determination and effort of will.

When a man was killed or failed to return, the Adjutant was responsible for collecting the lost man's personal effects. The men living in the same hut as the missing man would gather his possessions from his footlocker and elsewhere. A detailed listing of the items would be made. This was a grim job. According to pilot David Young, it became a practice to tell new replacements to make up their own lists, which greatly unnerved some of them. One new man was openly crying as he made out his list. He was killed the following day.²⁹⁸

The flyers also paid their mess bills in advance so their surviving comrades would not have to cover the costs should a flyer not return.²⁹⁹

Friday, September 13th was little better in terms of weather. The squadron history relates that there was "a treacherous wind still blowing." Only five aircraft were fit for duty. At 3:15 p.m. this little formation took off to bomb the roads between Chambley and Mars-la-Tour.

Pilots

Bradley Gaylord
Thomas H. Farnsworth
Stephen T. Hopkins

Observers

Howard Rath
Bob Thompson
Bertram Williams

²⁹⁷ Codman, *Contact*, p. 90.

²⁹⁸ Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, Davis H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 163.

²⁹⁹ Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 163.

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Newton C. Rogers
Pat Anderson

Kenneth P. Strawn
Stewart A. McDowell

There is no indication as to why Stewart McDowell was flying with Pat Anderson rather than Hugh Thompson. In any case, their aircraft was unable to leave the field having its propeller broken by kicked up mud. Newton Rogers and Ken Strawn made a forced landing at Badonvilliers-Gérauvillier, a mile and half away, a few moments after takeoff. The three remaining aircraft proceeded on the mission. They bombed an ammunition dump at Chambley from an altitude of only 1000 meters (3,280 feet).

At the objective, the tiny force was surrounded by fifteen enemy scouts. A wild aerial battle ensued. One enemy aircraft was shot down. The aircraft of Tom Farnsworth and Bob Thompson was seen to go down under control near Charey. However, both were killed. They may have made a forced landing and were killed after surviving the landing.³⁰⁰

Stephen Hopkins and Bert Williams went down in flames near Dommartin.³⁰¹ Incredibly, Bradley Gaylord and Howard Rath managed to avoid being shot down themselves.

Howard Rath, observer in the lone surviving aircraft, wrote to the parents of Bert Williams saying, "I want to tell you with my whole heart that a man never died a braver death than your son did." To Rath,

It looked hopeless, and as for myself I never expected to get back across the lines – Lt. Williams and his pilot, Lt. Hopkins, Lt. [Bob] Thompson and his pilot Lt. Farnsworth, being of course slightly in the rear had to stand the brunt of the fighting, but the odds were so great that the attack was coming from three sides at once. Nevertheless, Lt. Williams and Lt. [Bob] Thompson stood by their guns so bravely until they were overwhelmed and forced down, that the attack was slowed up for an instant and no doubt that instant was a

³⁰⁰ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 76. The report by the Engineering Department for aircraft 12006 indicates that Farnsworth and Bob Thompson were "shot down and killed after landing (supposition)."

³⁰¹ Stephen Hopkins and Bertram Williams are both buried at St. Mihiel American Cemetery at Thiaucourt, France. Hopkins is in Plot C, row 27, grave 2. Williams is in Plot C, row 27, grave 12.

great factor in carrying out the mission. I feel that when these officers in the two planes that went over on this mission, absolutely unprotected by scout planes, not only succeeded in carrying out the mission before they were killed but aided one of the other planes in returning safely to the lines, their heroism in doing all this deserves to come under the consideration of whatever Board at Washington has the awarding of the Distinguished Service Cross.³⁰²

Steve Hopkins, Bertram Williams, Thomas Farnsworth and Robert E. Thompson were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, posthumously. Bradley Gaylord and Howard Rath, who lived to tell the tale, were also awarded the DSC.

Steve Hopkins and Bert Williams had both attended Harvard College and knew Charles Codman there. They arrived at Amanty on September 7th. This was their second mission. Hopkins, born March 19, 1892, was a direct descendant of Declaration of Independence signer, Stephen Hopkins. Bert Williams had celebrated his 22nd birthday two days before this, his last mission. He had volunteered for the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps and served at the Front near Verdun in March 1916. In 1917, he volunteered for the Air Service.³⁰³

Bradley Gaylord and Howard Rath, with a great deal of luck and help from the defensive fire of Bert Williams and Bob Thompson, managed to get away and crossed the lines to return safely to the airdrome. Despite the deaths of eight squadron members, the squadron history commented that “the losses of the first two days in no way disheartened the fliers of the 96th.” Codman wrote, in reaction to that comment, “Well, perhaps not.”³⁰⁴

The airmen of the 96th squadron could not have been blamed if they experienced strong reactions, far beyond “disheartened,” to the reality of the 25 percent loss of flyers that the squadron suffered in only two days. Surely, there were dark individual private thoughts as well as airman to airman discussions in the hangars and huts. Was it courting suicide to send over small formations when they might be attacked by ten or even twenty enemy pursuit planes? Was the

³⁰² Ticknor, Caroline, *New England Aviators, 1914-1918, Their Portraits and Their Records*, p. 140.

³⁰³ Ticknor, *New England Aviators*, p. 133, 138.

³⁰⁴ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 17-18, 50-51. Codman, *Contact*, p. 86, 90-91.

DESTINY'S WINGS

dropping of a few hundred pounds of bombs worth the loss of aircraft and men? Should mission protocol change to allow the bombers to flee to the safety of the Allied lines upon sighting enemy pursuit planes? Why can not the bombers be protected by our own pursuit planes? What is the life expectancy of a bomber team? Are we entirely expendable? Far more questions would arise than answers. One wonders what the morale was like at this time.

With improving weather conditions, three missions were flown on September 14th. The remaining aircraft had been furiously worked on during the night to get them ready for the day's action. The first mission took off at 6:45 a.m. and returned at 8:25. The target was Conflans.

Pilots

Dave Young
Belmont Beverly
Pat Anderson
Cecil Young
Harold J. Forshay
Paul E. Lakin
Newton C. Rogers
Walton B. Ten Eyck
Bruce Hopper- Camera
Raymond C. Taylor

Observers

Sam Lunt
Frank Newbury
Hugh Thompson
Ralph Anspach
Paul J. O'Donnell
Charles Douglas
Ken Strawn
John H. Smith
Arthur Kelly
William A. Stuart

The formation of ten aircraft dwindled to three due to mud-broken propellers, engine problems, and other unnamed reasons. Only the teams of Dave Young and Sam Lunt, Pat Anderson and Hugh Thompson, and Bruce Hopper and Arthur Kelly crossed the lines.³⁰⁵

The squadron history records that

on the morning of [September] 16th [sic. the date was actually the 14th] the formation, which left the field with Cap. Young in the lead at 6:40 dwindled to three planes before reaching the lines north of Verdun. In spite of his meagre support, Capt. Young continued his course to the

³⁰⁵ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 18. The narrative of the Squadron history contains a typographical error as the action described in the second paragraph as taking place on the morning of September 16th when the action actually occurred on September 14th.

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objective, Conflans, which was concealed by several layers of clouds. A favorable opening permitted the formation to descend below the clouds, and the leading observer, 1st Lieut. Samuel M. Lunt, scored a perfect hit at the neck of the railroad yards. Enemy scouts began to appear before the objective was reached, despite which, 1st Lieut. Bruce C. Hopper, pilot of the photographic plane, maneuvered over the city until his observer, 1st Lieut. Arthur H. Kelly [squadron photographic officer], obtained pictures of the burst. A game of hide and seek in the clouds with twenty enemy planes was the program for the next half hour. The third plane, 1st Lieut. Charles P. Anderson, pilot, and 1st Lieut. Hugh S. Thompson, observer, closed in abreast of the other two, allowing the three observers to keep up a constant barrage while the pilots maneuvered in and out of the cloud alleys. All three planes landed safely at the home field.³⁰⁶

Three trains were observed going in the direction of Dommary-Baroncourt, about three kilometers north of Conflans. Two trains of 100 to 150 cars were going south into Mars-la-Tour. One train of 100 cars was going south into Chambley. At Conflans the yards contained about 200 cars.³⁰⁷ The Germans were on the move. If only more bombers were available to strike these choice targets.

The second mission was flown to bomb enemy troops along the Moselle between Vittonville and Arnaville.

Pilots

Belmont Beverly
Bradley Gaylord
Cecil Young
Raymond Taylor
Edward D. Baker
Paul Lakin
Newton Rogers
Charles Codman

Observers

Frank Newbury
Arthur Cawston
Ralph Anspach
William A. Stuart
John K. Milner
Charles Douglas
Ken Strawn
Warren Pressler

³⁰⁶ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 18.

³⁰⁷ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 113.

DESTINY'S WINGS

Harold Forshay
Edmond Bates

Paul O'Donnell
Avrome Hexter

The teams of Bradley Gaylord and Arthur Cawston; Cecil Young and Ralph Anspach; Raymond Taylor and William Stuart; and Charles Codman and Warren Pressler continued on to the objective; the other six aircraft dropped out with engine troubles. The mission was uneventful having bombed Vittenville with four bursts in town. At Arnville, six bursts hit troop wagon trains and a corral of horses. No enemy aircraft were seen.

The third mission on the 14th, taking off at 3:15 p.m., was to bomb Conflans.

Pilots

Dave Young
Lewis Turnbull
Walton Ten Eyck
Bruce Hopper

Observers

Sam Lunt
Stewart McDowell
John H. Smith
Arthur Kelly

They bombed wagons, troop trains and horses seen along the roads. Enemy aircraft gave chase, but Dave Young led the formation into clouds and evaded them. All returned safely.

Two missions were flown on September 15th. The first left Amanty at 11:00 a.m. and returned at 1:00 after bombing the bridge at Arnville. This mission may have included bombing and strafing troops. The bombload was a total of 1825 pounds which included twelve 90-mm, eight 115-mm long, ten 155-mm and six incendiary bombs.

Pilots

Pat Anderson
Belmont Beverly
Edmond Bates
Cecil Young
Newton Rogers
R. P. Elliott
Edward Baker

Observers

Hugh Thompson
Frank Newbury
Warren Pressler
Avrome Hexter
Ken Strawn
Arthur C. Ellis
John K. Milner

The first mission was attacked by nine enemy aircraft, probably Fokkers, over Arnville. However, the attacks were not pressed. No

DESTINY'S WINGS

damage or casualties were sustained. A train was observed south of Arnaville. Anti-aircraft fire was active and accurate.³⁰⁸

The second mission of September 15th left at 3:15 p.m. to bomb Longuyon. It returned at 5:05 p.m.

Pilots

Bradley Gaylord
Charles Codman
Bruce Hopper
Paul Lakin
Harold Forshay
Newton Rogers
Edward Baker

Observers

Sam Lunt
William A. Stuart
Arthur Kelly
Charles Douglas
Paul O'Donnell
Ken Strawn
John Milner

The four teams of Bradley Gaylord and Sam Lunt, Bruce Hopper and Arthur Kelly, Paul Lakin and Charles Douglas, and that of Harold Forshay and Paul O'Donnell reached the objective. The others dropped out prior to crossing the lines.

Six enemy aircraft followed the formation from Longuyon to the lines at Verdun but did not close to engage.

³⁰⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 18, 52, 116.

CHAPTER 20
WINGS OF DESTINY
SEPTEMBER 16, 1918

Three missions took place on September 16th. The first mission was to bomb Longuyon. It took off at 6:05 a.m. and returned at 8 a.m.

Pilots

Dave Young
Pat Anderson
Edmond Bates
Cecil Young
Walton Ten Eyck
R. P. Elliott
Edward D. Baker

Observers

Howard Rath
Hugh Thompson
Warren Pressler
Lyman C. Bleecker
John H. Smith
Arthur C. Ellis
John K. Milner

All aircraft reached the objective and returned safely. The visibility was good, with 2910 pounds of bombs dropped. No enemy aircraft were seen.

At lunch Pat Anderson was in high spirits. "This is more like the good old days," he said. "Four thousand meters, air like a mill-pond, and no Boches." He then turned to Hugh and Codman and said, "do you remember flying up from Clermont? Besides Evans, we are the only ones left. It won't be long now."³⁰⁹ To Codman and Hugh, who certainly knew of Pat Anderson's mysterious and disturbing ability to see into the future, this must have been a very difficult moment.

The second mission was to bomb Conflans. The flight left at 12:45 p.m. and returned at 3 p.m. Visibility was good.

Pilots

Bradley Gaylord
Belmont Beverly
Lewis Turnbull
Newton Rogers

Observers

Sam Lunt
Frank Newbury
Arthur Cawston
Ken Strawn

³⁰⁹ Codman, *Contact*, p. 93-99.

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Charles Codman
Bruce Hopper
Harold Forshay

Warren Pressler
Arthur Kelly
Paul O'Donnell

The bombing teams of Newton Rogers and Ken Strawn, and Charles Codman and Warren Pressler did not reach the target. Codman relates that when he was over Bar-le-Duc his engine began sputtering, and so he turned back to land at Amanty. Those who reached the objective all returned safely. They saw six enemy aircraft on the ground but, fortunately, none in the air.³¹⁰

They did, however, see a great deal of railroad and truck traffic. One twenty-five railroad car train at Jarny was heading south. There were three trains, with steam up, in the yards at Metz. There were 350 cars at Conflans, 600 at Brily, 500 at Dommary-Baroncourt, 500 at Moineville, and 200 at Etain.³¹¹ Clearly, the Germans were on the move and were prime bombing targets. Unfortunately, there were not enough bombers to hit these targets let alone to hit them sufficiently hard.

Hugh's last flight of the day, the third mission, went into the air at 5 p.m. to drop propaganda leaflets and more importantly to bomb the railroad yard at Conflans once again. Pat and Hugh were the formation leaders.

Pilots

Pat Anderson
Dave Young
Charles Codman
Raymond Taylor
Cecil Young
R. P. Elliott
Walton Ten Eyck
Newton Rogers

Observers

Hugh Thompson
Avrome Hexter
Stewart A. McDowell
William A. Stuart
Lyman Bleecker
Arthur C. Ellis
John H. Smith
Ken Strawn

Half the flight dropped out before reaching the objective, returning to Amanty at 7 p.m. The last aircraft to turn back was that of R.P. Elliott and Arthur Ellis. It could not keep up with the formation so they dropped their bomb load at Hadonville, then returned to the

³¹⁰ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 53.

³¹¹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 119.

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airdrome.³¹² The four teams who continued to Conflans were Pat Anderson and Hugh Thompson; Charles Codman and Stewart McDowell; Raymond Taylor and William Stuart; and Newton Rogers and Ken Strawn.

Pat and Hugh led in the number 1 position in the formation. On the right in number 2 position, slightly above and to the rear was the plane of Taylor and Stuart; in number 3 position Codman and McDowell were on the left at the same relative height as Taylor and Stuart. Bringing up the rear, in position number 4, was the plane of Rogers and Strawn flying above the level of positions 2 and 3.³¹³

No. 1

No. 3

No. 2

No. 4

Charles Codman told the story of the flight.³¹⁴ September 16th, Monday, was a beautiful day just as Pat Anderson had remarked at lunch. Bright sun. At 12,000 feet, two and a half miles high, the air was cold and clear. Verdun was clearly visible with its brown ring of war-torn landscape. They crossed the lines. Anti-aircraft fire made some feeble attempts at the little formation but did no damage.

Suddenly, a red flare was shot from Hugh's Very pistol. Enemy aircraft were in sight. Eight small specks were visible to the North at the same level. Slightly above them were another eight specks. Above those were eight more. Twenty-four enemy aircraft were approaching.³¹⁵

The three enemy groups separated. One group swung around to

³¹² Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 120.

³¹³ Codman, *Contact*, p. 97.

³¹⁴ The description of the September 16th mission is taken from Codman, *Contact*, p. 96-102.

³¹⁵ Twenty-four is a very large number of attacking aircraft. It is possible that Codman unintentionally exaggerated the number. However, in his POW debriefing [Gorrell, Series M, vol. 10, p. 49] upon being released after the War, he stated that there were twenty-four attacking enemy aircraft. Perhaps, but only perhaps, Codman was thinking that it would be easier on the families of those shot down if they had been killed by overwhelming odds.

the rear, the second went to the southeast to cut off any retreat. The third group of eight enemy scouts bore directly down on the four bombers.

The Americans flew tightly together with wings almost overlapping. Pat Anderson turned to Codman who saw Anderson's teeth flashing white as he smiled. Was that a gesture of, "remember what I told you at lunch? It won't be long now" from Anderson?

With an overwhelming enemy attack imminent, "Pat remained perfectly calm throughout and kept on flying his plane as if nothing were happening."³¹⁶ Codman saw Hugh setting his bombsight. Over Conflans Hugh released his bombs, the other three planes dropped their bombs as well. The enemy were Fokker D. VII pursuit planes of Jasta (fighter squadron) 19. They were excellent aircraft and Jasta 19 had the reputation of being one of the finest of the German squadrons.

Codman's observer Stewart McDowell wrote, "Pat, instead of starting the machine downward, bravely faced the machine-gun fire of the Boche, thus protecting the other planes back of him...such a wonderfully brave deed..."³¹⁷

There was a rattling of machine guns and tracer bullets zipping through the air around the American planes. The observers fired back with their twin Lewis guns. Three Germans dived on Ray Taylor and Bill Stuart. Taylor apparently was hit by the first burst as his plane went out of control. However, Stuart continued to fire. Codman's observer, Stewart McDowell, fired at the planes attacking Taylor and Stuart; an enemy plane went down trailing black smoke. Taylor and Stuart fell out of the formation as Bill Stuart's fire knocked down another enemy. Suddenly, their gas tank was hit. Taylor and Stuart went down in flames and crashed near the village of Mainville.³¹⁸ Ray Taylor was fifteen days short of his 1st wedding anniversary.³¹⁹

Pat Anderson turned his Breguet, but only Codman's plane was

³¹⁶ Codman quoted in Seymour, James W.D., *Memorial Volume of the American Field Service in France*, p. 155.

³¹⁷ Seymour, *Memorial Volume of the American Field Service in France*, p. 155. McDowell is not named but rather referred to as "another survivor." As McDowell is the only survivor other than Codman, excepting Germans, the quotation must be from McDowell.

³¹⁸ Ticknor, *New England Aviators*, p. 148. They both were initially buried at Mainville.

³¹⁹ Gefreiter [German rank] Felder received credit for this victory. It was his second. Ticknor, *New England Aviators*, p. 148.

still with him. The plane of Newt Rogers and Ken Strawn, which had been at the rear, was plummeting down. It too was in flames.³²⁰

The attack now concentrated on the lead plane carrying Pat and Hugh. Two Germans dived out of the sun while another attacked from below. Codman wrote,

the gas tank is hit. Red flames. Anderson bends his head and flies straight ahead. Thompson keeps up a steady barrage. The fabric of the wings is on fire. The flames reach the fuselage. The entire plane is a fiery torch. Still it flies straight ahead. Anderson and Thompson are completely enveloped in flames. The plane is sinking now. The burning fabric curls back, revealing the skeleton of wings and fuselage. From the midst of the falling incandescent mass, tracer-bullets continue to stream upward.^{321 322}

It was 5:55 p.m., five minutes to noon in New York City, perhaps Hugh's mother was sitting down to have lunch.

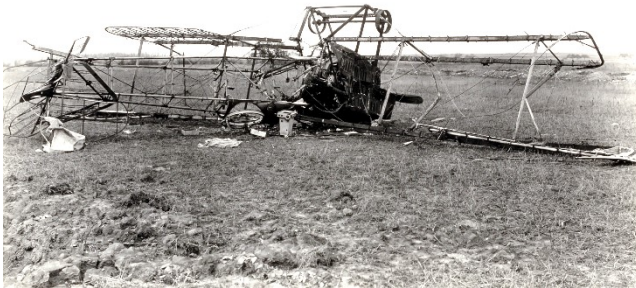


Figure 18. Breguet Photographic Plane Brought Down in Flames, World War I, ca. 1914-1918, photo by Edward Steichen, Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Codman and McDowell were all that remained of the flight. Codman twisted and turned but the cause was hopeless. His observer, Stewart McDowell, was shot through both legs but he still managed to shoot down two of the enemy. The instrument panel was ripped by bullets. Then, the

³²⁰ Lt. Rudolf Rienau received credit for this victory. It was his fifth.

³²¹ Codman, *Contact*, p. 98-99.

³²² Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 76. Hugh and Pat were flying Breguet aircraft #4494 bearing number 14 on the fuselage and wings.

propeller was shredded, a rudder wire cut, the left aileron torn away, and the powerless plane went into a spin as it fell four thousand meters. Codman regained enough control to make a crash landing. He and McDowell survived and spent the rest of the war in a German prison camp.³²³

Codman received the Silver Star and from the French the Croix de Guerre with palm for gallantry in action for the September 16, 1918 engagement. Stewart McDowell, Codman's observer, also received the Silver Star. Hugh Thompson, Pat Anderson, Raymond Taylor, William Stuart, Newton Rogers and Kenneth Strawn, all killed in this action, received no decorations.

The German pilot who received credit for having shot down Pat and Hugh was Lt. Oliver von Beaulieu-Marconnay the commander of Jagdstaffel Jasta (squadron) 19. The combat took place over the village of Fleville-Lixieres, six miles north of Conflans. Pat and Hugh were Beaulieu-Marconnay's 19th victory.

Beaulieu-Marconnay also shot down Codman, but this was not confirmed, probably as there were other attacking aircraft taking part.³²⁴ Beaulieu-Marconnay's final official victory score was twenty-five Allied aircraft. He was badly wounded on October 16th and died of his wounds on the 26th. He was the youngest recipient of the Pour Le Merite (Blue Max).³²⁵ He had celebrated his 20th birthday two days before shooting down Pat and Hugh.

As Pat and Hugh were shot down within the German lines they were buried by the Germans. Pat was buried at Joudreville, Meurthe-et-Moselle, nine miles northwest of Conflans. It is almost certain that Hugh was buried there as well.³²⁶ Later, their bodies were transferred

³²³ The German pilots credited with these four victories were from Jasta 19. There is no record of any pilots from Jasta 19 being killed on September 16th. The doomed flight may, or may not, have shot down one or more aircraft, but those aircraft may have managed to land without the pilots being killed. Also, during such a combat no one was watching to see if an enemy aircraft actually went down or simply disengaged. Perhaps the story of the American victories was an attempt to soften the blow to the families of the Americans who were killed that day, or, the German records may be in error.

³²⁴ Van Wyngarden, Greg, *Jagdgeschwader NR II Geschwader Berthold*, p. 100.

³²⁵ Franks, Norman, Bailey, Frank, Duiven, Dick, *The Jasta War Chronology*.

³²⁶ Seymour, James W.D., editor, *Memorial Volume of the American Field Service in France*, Boston: American Field Service, 1921, p. 154-156. The initial burial location was only 3.5 miles east of Dommery-Baroncourt, the target of the first ever U.S. bombing mission which included Hugh and Pat.

to St. Mihiel American Cemetery, Thiaucourt, Meurthe-et-Moselle. Hugh is buried at Plot C, Row 27, grave 14. Pat is eight graves away at grave number 6.³²⁷

As the entire flight had been shot down, the men of the 96th Squadron back at Amanty did not know what had happened to them. They were last seen heading for Conflans by Elliott and Ellis as they turned for home with an ailing engine.³²⁸ They were never seen again. The missing could have landed in friendly territory and would show up later in the night or the following day. They might have crashed in German territory and were making their way toward Allied lines. They may have been taken prisoner. Or all or some of them may have been killed. At Amanty the mechanics and airmen stared into the night sky and speculated on the fate of the missing men for several hours, occasionally firing Very pistols, with diminishing hope that the lost airmen would find their way home. They had done this too often in the past to be optimistic.

The 96th squadron suffered severe casualties during the five-day St. Mihiel offensive losing fourteen planes destroyed in combat or in crashes. Fourteen airmen were dead, including 2nd Lt. James A. O'Toole, Codman's observer, who was on a detached assignment at the time he was killed. Two airmen were captured.³²⁹ However, the St. Mihiel salient was removed, the bulge in the Front was straightened, and the Germans retreated.

Two weeks after the disastrous September 16th mission, the 96th squadron aircraft were updated with improvements that might have saved lives lost on that day. A new pilot seat was armored to protect the pilot from gunfire from the rear and below. The installation of a three-ply heavy rubber covering for the main gas tank would have been of particular interest to Hugh and Pat as it rendered the gas tank self-sealing, greatly reducing the chance of fire if pierced by bullets. In addition, there was a reserve fuel tank that could be detached and dropped from the aircraft in case it was set afire.

The official report of the Engineering Department at Amanty states that "had the squadron been equipped with this ... the toll of casualties due to fire from incendiary bullets fired by the enemy chase

³²⁷ American Battle Monuments Commission – www.abmc.gov

³²⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 19.

³²⁹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 19.

planes, in the St. Mihiel salient would have been greatly reduced.”³³⁰ What a difference a couple of weeks would have made.

When the war ended the men who had not returned the night of September 16th were still listed as missing. Word of their fate did not reach the squadron until after the Armistice when Codman was released from POW camp. A telegram from General Headquarters, A.E.F. dated November 30th in part read, “1st Lt. Hugh S. Thompson and C.P. Anderson 96th Aero Squadron missing since September 16th Lt. Charles R. Codman Air Service now in Paris Care of Hottingner and Company 38 Rue De Provence reports plane of Thompson and Anderson brought down in flames...”³³¹

A final, and unusual, record comes from the Germans in June 1927. A batch of American identity cards was handed to the American Consulate in Stuttgart, Germany. Among them were three belonging to Hugh including his A.E.F. Headquarters, Air Service; Federation Aeronautique Internationale; and A.E.F. Headquarters cards. Cards for other members of the 96th Squadron included Raymond Taylor, William Stuart and Thornton Hooper now of the 20th Squadron.³³² It is not known what became of the cards once in the custody of the Consulate.

³³⁰ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 70.

³³¹ Cablegrams Exchanged Between General Headquarters, A.E.F. and the War Department, 1917-19, Folder Date Range 27-Nov-1918 to 10-Dec-1918. NARA, Publication number: M930, Roll: 0014, Cable number 2262.

³³² NARA, Record Group 59, Publication M367, roll: 0322, document 763.72114/5845.

CHAPTER 21

THE END OF THE WAR IS IN SIGHT

The disaster of September 16th curtailed missions for a few days due to a lack of aircraft. Pilots and observers were available but few aircraft were. It was determined, finally, that to fly small formations was inviting disaster and no more missions should be flown with a small formation. However, sufficient aircraft were not always available. In fact, the squadron almost never had enough aircraft to put up a formation that was able to defend itself. If they had not flown until they had ten, fifteen or twenty aircraft to put into the air, the squadron would rarely have flown a mission.

There were fifty-six days between Hugh's death on September 16th until the end of the War on November 11th. During that period the 96th Aero Squadron flew only fifteen missions.³³³

The first mission flown after the disaster of September 16th was on September 26th. The 96th Aero Squadron had moved on the 23rd and 24th to a new airfield at Maulan, eighteen miles northwest of Amanty. Eight planes took off but only six reached the target. Observer Paul J. O'Donnell, who had joined the squadron on September 10th was killed by machine gunfire. He was the last member of the 96th Squadron to be killed in combat.

Sometime after the move to Maulan, pilot Bruce Hopper went back to Amanty and cut up the wooden table on which he and his hut-mates had carved their names, and he gave the pieces to their pilots as souvenirs.³³⁴ So many other names, the names of those who had been killed or were no longer with the squadron, that were carved on the tables remained there.

A peculiar mission was flown on September 27th to bomb Etain. The formation consisted of only three aircraft. There was heavy cloud cover so the result of the bombing was unknown. Six Fokker aircraft were seen and shots were exchanged at a "considerable distance" with

³³³ The mission reports until the end of the war are from Gorrell, Series E, Volume 14, pages 57-64.

³³⁴ Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 163.

DESTINY'S WINGS

no damage done.

September 29th marked a milestone as fourteen allied pursuit planes escorted twelve bombers to the target. Only on August 14th had the 96th been escorted prior to this and on that day only one Spad went all the way to the target and back. On this day, no enemy aircraft were sighted and there were no losses.

One mission was flown on October 1st consisting of twelve aircraft. There were no losses.

The mission of October 2nd contained thirteen aircraft. It was attacked by eight enemy aircraft. Lt. James P. Walden was shot through a finger. One aircraft went down near the lines. However, the pilot and observer were unhurt.

There was one mission on October 3rd consisting of thirteen aircraft. They all returned safely.

The morning mission on October 4th was flown by thirteen aircraft. All returned safely although the formation was followed by fifteen enemy Fokker or Pfalz planes that followed and fired from long range. The afternoon mission was flown by seven aircraft; one returned with engine trouble before crossing the lines. The remaining small formation attracted thirty enemy aircraft that engaged in a running battle back to the Allied lines. Two of the enemy were confirmed as being shot down. The formation's aircraft were "pretty badly shot up," but all returned, and there were no injuries.

One mission was flown on October 5th by ten aircraft. Three turned back with engine trouble, the remaining seven carried out the mission and returned safely. The October 6th mission also took off with ten aircraft, one returned before crossing the lines, and all returned safely.

No missions were flown on October 7th, 8th or 9th. On the 10th two missions were flown. The first contained thirteen aircraft but only six reached the objective. They returned safely. The second mission consisted of twelve aircraft, ten of which reached the objective. No enemy aircraft were seen.

No missions were flown on October 11th through the 17th due to poor weather conditions. On October 18th one mission with fourteen aircraft reached the objective. Fifteen enemy aircraft were seen but they did not engage. Clearly, the Germans were not eager to attack the larger Breguet formations.

There were no missions flown on October 19th through the 22nd due to poor weather conditions. On the 23rd twelve aircraft started on

a mission but due to engine troubles only seven crossed the lines. Seven enemy aircraft were encountered but only three attacked the formation. Two of the enemy were claimed to have been shot down.

No mission was flown on the 24th. However, pilot 1st Lt. Edward D. Baker was killed in a crash. He had been ferrying an airplane back to the airdrome when some malfunction occurred causing him to crash at the Rumont airdrome. Baker had joined the 96th squadron on September 12th.

No missions were flown on the 25th and the 26th. One mission was flown on the 27th of October when eleven aircraft took off and ten reached the objective. They saw ten Fokkers and were attacked by six of them during which "a lively combat ensued." Lt. Walton B. Ten Eyck and Arthur E. Newell made a forced landing after Lt. Ten Eyck was slightly wounded in the arm. Observer Lt. Henry L. Pancoast was seriously wounded, shot through the stomach and lungs. His pilot, R. P. Elliott, did some quick thinking and made a forced landing behind the lines at a hospital as that was the fastest way that Pancoast could get medical treatment.³³⁵

No mission was flown on October 28th. On the 29th one mission of ten aircraft, with seven reaching the objective, was flown. Again, the small formation attracted unwanted enemy attention. Of the thirty Fokkers observed, ten to fifteen of them attacked. The formation claimed that two were shot down. Later another enemy aircraft was claimed by Lt. Gilbert Stanley and Lt. H. T. Folger who had dropped out of the formation with engine trouble. Oddly, members of the Hospital at Fronerville were cited as witnesses to their victory. Both Stanley and Folger were slightly wounded and in the hospital. Stanley and Folger had joined the squadron on October 12th.

There was no mission flown on October 30th. On the 31st ten aircraft began the mission and seven reached the objective. Fortunately, no enemy aircraft were encountered.

No missions were flown on November 1st nor on the 2nd. Two missions took off on November 3rd. The first consisted of eleven aircraft with six reaching the objective. They all returned safely. The second mission began with seven aircraft and six reached the objective. Three Fokkers were seen but they did not engage as twelve Spads had met the formation and escorted it to the target and back to the lines. This was only the third time the 96th bombers had been

³³⁵ Hopper, Bruce C., "American Day Bombardment in World War 1," p. 96.

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escorted by pursuit planes.

The final mission of the war for the 96th Aero Squadron was flown on November 4th. Nine aircraft took off and six reached the objective. The target was Chevancy-le Chateau. However, strike photographs showed that Montmady, the wrong location although still behind enemy lines, was bombed in error. The flight leader was Captain David H. Young with his observer 1st Lt. Samuel M. Lunt. The last mission of the war was flown by the teams of:

Pilots

Captain David H. Young
1st Lt. Lewis F. Turnbull
1st Lt. Joseph F. Haskins
1st Lt. W. H. Moreland
1st Lt. Thomas R. Reed
1st Lt. Henry O. McDougal

Observers

1st Lt. Samuel M. Lunt
1st Lt. Edward W. Lindsay
1st Lt. James C. Rollins
2nd Lt. William R. Maynard
1st Lt. Henry J. Spaulding
2nd Lt. E. K. McKay

Turnbull and Lindsay dropped out prior to reaching the target. On their way back to the airdrome they bombed Murvaux.

Fifteen very aggressive enemy aircraft were encountered. Two were claimed to have been shot down. Lt. Henry Spaulding was shot through both hands. It was his first mission having joined the squadron on November 2nd.

At 11 a.m., November 11, 1918, World War I, The Great War, the War to End All Wars, ended. At that very moment, the airfield at Maulan was rocked by an explosion. Some of the men had rigged up a couple of bombs and set them off in the woods. Later, the squadron was billed by the French for damage to the trees.³³⁶ At the end of the war, the 96th Squadron had sixteen pilots and eighteen observers available for duty but they would not be needed. It was time to go home.

When the war ended the 96th had twenty-three aircraft in their inventory. A total of sixty-three aircraft had been received and forty lost due to crashes, accidents and enemy action. 110 men had been assigned to flight status between May 17, 1918 and November 11, 1918. Of those 110 men, forty-one joined the squadron after Hugh's death on September 16th. The squadron lost twelve men as POWs, thirteen wounded, three killed in accidents and seventeen killed in

³³⁶ Leiser, "Red Devil in a Breguet, David H. Young, 96th Aero Squadron," p. 163.

action. Twenty-seven men were transferred out of the squadron during this period.³³⁷

After Major Brown's disastrous mission on July 10th, there were only two aircraft remaining in the 96th Aero Squadron. One of them, Number 18, bearing serial number 4018, had a strange history. It had been used heavily at Clermont as a trainer for six months before being transferred to the 96th Aero Squadron. Flown by the squadron's Commanding Officer and flight commander, Major Brown, it was the first aircraft to cross the lines leading the flight on the historic first-ever bombing mission on June 12th. It was undergoing engine repair on July 10th and so was not captured along with the rest of that doomed flight. Later, it was the first aircraft to wear the Red Devil insignia.

On September 4th, Number 18 brought the badly wounded Sheep Alexander and John McLennan back to Amanty.

On September 13th, Number 18, carrying Pat Anderson and Stewart McDowell, had its propeller broken by kicked up mud; so it could not take part in the raid. The raid became a disaster with only one aircraft returning after a horrific battle with enemy aircraft.

Number 18 lost its engine cowling on take-off on September 16th. Therefore it did not take part in the final mission flown by Hugh and Pat Anderson in which no aircraft returned.

The squadron history appearing in *Gorrell's History*, written by pilots Bruce C. Hopper and David H. Young, relates that Number 18 had been hit over 100 times by enemy bullets and shrapnel. Also, that "on one raid the whole right side of the fuselage covering from the pilot's cockpit to the rudder post was torn open with shrapnel. The tail section was replaced three times, the lower wings six times, the upper wings twice and the landing carriage twice. The only portion of the original plane left intact is the fuselage from the observer's cockpit to the engine bed." The damages listed may be correct. However, it is also stated that Number 18 was "still serviceable when the armistice was signed."³³⁸ Unfortunately that is incorrect.

In truth, Number 18 was destroyed in a crash "due to high gale" on September 25th. The pilot was 1st Lt. Robert S. Stewart. This aircraft, 4018, Number 18, was singled out by the Engineering Dept

³³⁷ Gorrell, Series N, vol. 16, p. 181-184. Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 79.

³³⁸ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 10. This error regarding Number 18 is repeated in Hopper's "American Day Bombardment in World War I," p. 90. Hopper also repeats the error in his *When the Air Was Young*, unpublished typescript, 1918, p. 87-88.

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in its list of aircraft as “Last of 10 original ships from the 7th A.I.C.”³³⁹ Unlucky Lt. Stewart had been assigned to the 96th squadron on September 19th. As no missions were flown on the 25th he likely was practicing. Wrecking lucky Number 18 probably did not endear Lt. Stewart to the squadron.

Codman's 1937 book, *Contact*, provides an excellent look at life in the squadron and flying in WWI. As Codman had been shot down and captured, it also gives a glimpse of the life of a POW at the end of the war. Codman's military life was not over, however. He reentered the Army in 1942 with the rank of Major and became an aide to General George C. Patton.³⁴⁰ After the War he had a career in real estate and became a lifelong expert in wines. Codman died on August 25, 1956.

³³⁹ Gorrell, Series E, vol. 14, p. 76. The Engineering Dept.'s list of planes lost.

³⁴⁰ In the 1970 film “Patton” starring George C. Scott, Codman is played by Paul Stevens.

CHAPTER 22

THE AFTERMATH

Back at home in the United States, the grim news of Hugh's death came agonizingly slowly. *The New York Times* carried an article on October 29, 1918, six weeks after his death, under the headline "New York Aviators On Casualty Lists, Lieut. H.S. Thompson, one of First Americans to Fly Over German Lines, Is Missing." The article continued,

Lieut. Hugh S. Thompson, 3rd, who was a member of the first American bombing squadron to fly over the German lines, has been missing since Sept. 16. He was a son of Mrs. Sarah G. Thompson of 22 East forty-fifth Street, and a grandson of the late Governor Hugh S. Thompson of South Carolina. He was one of three brothers who went overseas with the American forces. Mrs. Thompson said last night that her son had been wounded twenty times in various actions, in which he had participated. On one occasion, Sept. 9, he was one of two American aviators of a squadron to return to the American lines. Lieut. Thompson was a member of the Ninety-sixth Aero Squadron under Brig. Gen Benjamin D. Foulolis.³⁴¹

One must wonder how the family reacted to the *Times* use of the past tense in the article while Hugh was listed as missing. He might have been captured rather than dead. There is no evidence to suggest that he was "wounded twenty times" as stated in the article. The shrapnel scratch on his face, of August 14th, is the only known wound. There was no mission on September 9th nor any in which Hugh and only one other aircraft returned.

Back in France, the badly wounded and heavily sedated HST Infantry was approached in the hospital by a Red Cross worker who had mistaken him for his missing airman cousin. In this way, HST

³⁴¹ *The New York Times*, October 29, 1918.

Infantry learned that Hugh had been missing since September 16th. He was told that Hugh's parents, John Means Thompson and Sarah Glasgow Thompson, "had sent frantic cables about him [Hugh]." The Red Cross woman told him that he would be notified when news was available about the missing Hugh.

HST Infantry had another soldier read his mail aloud to him while undergoing treatment in a hospital in December 1918. This soldier only "after much evasion and after my insistence, read the messages involving the other Hugh." They must have been extraordinarily difficult messages for the soldier to read, as well as for HST Infantry to hear. The first was a letter from Hugh written on September 10, 1918, two days before HST Infantry was severely wounded and six days before he himself was killed. It reads:

Dear Hugh

Received your letter today and it was a pleasure to learn that we gave you such a good time up here. Have delivered your messages to Pat, Major Baldwin, Codman and Farnsworth³⁴² and they all send their best.

Had a letter from Uncle Tom, [this would be Thomas Clarkson Thompson, HST Infantry's father], which I have just finished answering. We have been working pretty hard lately. Ten enemy planes attacked us when we were up today [this combat actually took place on September 4th] and four of our men were wounded, but managed to get home ok. I shot one of the Boches down in flames.

Let's hope you are more fortunate from now on and that you go through the rest of this without a scratch. Luck, old man.

Hugh

The accompanying dispatch read:

In reply to your inquiry concerning your cousin, the above named officer, we have obtained information from our office in Berne that a letter has been received from Lieut. Codman, dated Rastatt prison camp, Sept. 21, 1918. The letter states that Lieut. Hugh S. Thompson, missing in action since Sept. 16, was brought down in

³⁴² Farnsworth was killed on September 13th.

flames.

Home and Communication Section, Bureau Home and Hospital Service.³⁴³

Within the family it has been said that Hugh jumped to escape the flaming aircraft.³⁴⁴ There is no solid evidence to indicate whether he did or did not jump. However, it is just possible that, as Hugh's identity cards were found and turned over to the U.S. by the Germans in 1927,³⁴⁵ their existence might mean that Hugh had jumped clear and was not consumed in the flaming wreck. It may be significant that Pat Anderson's cards were not returned, but the cards of both William Stuart and Raymond Taylor were among those returned. The team of Stuart and Taylor was shot down in flames on the fatal last flight, along with Hugh and Pat. It is not known whether they jumped, but the fact that the identity cards were not burned is reasonable evidence for Hugh jumping.

Eddie Rickenbacker wrote that "no form of death is so dreaded by the pilot as falling to the earth in flames. ...our most noted member leaped overboard to his death to avoid the slower torture of being burnt alive."³⁴⁶ Rickenbacker was referring to his friend, the American Ace, Raoul Lufberry, who recommended that a pilot *not* jump saying, "if you jump you certainly haven't got a chance. On the other hand there is always a good chance of side-slipping your airplane down in such a way that you fan the flames away from yourself and the wings. Perhaps you can even put the fire out before you reach the ground. Me for staying with the old 'bus, every time!"³⁴⁷ However, when Lufberry's plane was going down in flames, he jumped to his death.

Conceivably, Hugh might have been saved if he had a parachute available. Eddie Rickenbacker wrote, "the fighters on the front can never understand why the authorities back home deny them necessary

³⁴³ Thompson, Hugh S., *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas*, p. 184-186.

³⁴⁴ Caroline Thompson Harrington, 1874-1969, the author's grandmother told the author, circa 1963, that she had heard that Hugh had jumped, coming down in a churchyard. She was Hugh's aunt. She gave the author her copy of Charles Codman's *Contact*, as well as an original photo of Hugh which she kept inside Codman's book.

³⁴⁵ NARA, Record Group 59, Publication M367, roll: 0322, document 763.72114/5845.

³⁴⁶ Rickenbacker, *Fighting the Flying Circus*, p. 51.

³⁴⁷ Rickenbacker, *Fighting the Flying Circus*, p. 97.

arms and ammunition. We air-fighters cannot understand why we cannot have parachutes fitted on our airplanes to give the doomed pilot one possible means of escape from these situations.” He further stated, “... German airmen had been saving their lives by airplane parachutes. A parachute is a very cheap contrivance compared to the cost of training an aviator. Lufbery and a score of other American aviators might have been saved to their country if such airplane equipment had been left to experienced pilots.”³⁴⁸ Ernst Udet, the German Ace, saved his life on June 29, 1918 by using his parachute when shot down.

General Henry “Hap” Arnold took another view. In 1949, he wrote referring to World War I, “Our airmen, too, could have had parachutes by then, but they were turned down as useless until after the Armistice – not by the War Department, but by flying officers themselves.”³⁴⁹

Eddie Rickenbacker would not agree. It would seem likely that Hugh Thompson, Pat Anderson, Tom Farnsworth, Andre Gundelach, Pinky Way, Steve Hopkins, Bob Thompson, Bert Williams, Newton Rogers, Bill Stuart, Ray Taylor, and Ken Strawn of the 96th Squadron as well as Raoul Lufberry, and the others who were shot down would have preferred the chance for survival that a parachute would have offered.

On January 13, 1919 *The New York Times* carried an article “Service for Lieut. Thompson,” which stated that

A memorial service for First Lieutenant Hugh Smith Thompson, 96th Aero Squadron, who was killed on Sept. 16 in an aerial bombing raid into Germany [sic], was held yesterday at St. Stephen’s Protestant Episcopal Church, 120 West Sixty-ninth Street. The services were conducted by the Rev. Dr. Nathan Seagle, the rector, who told of Lieutenant Thompson’s heroism when on a bombing expedition he was attacked by a German crossfire and after a bitter fight was sent down in flames by two German planes. Lieutenant Thompson had spent three months in active service at the American front

³⁴⁸ Rickenbacker, *Fighting the Flying Circus*, p. 228.

³⁴⁹ Arnold, H.H., *Global Mission*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 49.

before he was killed. He was a son of Major and Mrs. John M. Thompson of 22 East Forty-fifth Street.³⁵⁰

It is unclear why the January 24, 1919 *Centralia Daily Chronicle* of Centralia, Washington, and other newspapers in cities unrelated to Hugh, carried articles, some on the front page, which even included a photograph of Hugh. Perhaps Hugh's participation in the first U.S. bombing mission elevated him to a position of newsworthiness. Or, it may be due to his being the grandson of a governor. The same article appeared in many newspapers, including Juneau's *Alaska Daily Empire*. Below the headline "Hero is Honored" it states,

Memorial services for Lieutenant Hugh S. Thompson of the Ninety Sixth Aero Squadron, the son of Major John M. Thompson, of the Quartermaster's Department, Washington, D.C., and Mrs. Sarah G. Thompson of New York, who was killed on September 16, when his airplane was shot down inside the German lines, were held in New York recently. Lieutenant Thompson, who is a grandson of the late Hugh S. Thompson, one-time Governor of South Carolina, was a member of the first American bombing squadron to fly into Germany [sic]. He was twenty-three years old, a graduate of the Staunton Military Academy and won his commission at the first officers' training camp at Plattsburgh, N.Y. He went overseas with the second contingent of American aviators.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ *The New York Times*, January 13, 1919. Now named Christ and St. Stephen's Church.

³⁵¹ *Centralia Daily Chronicle* [Centralia, Washington], January 24, 1919. *Alaska Daily Empire* [Juneau, Alaska], January 28, 1919, p. 3.

CHAPTER 23
THE GOLD STAR MOTHERS

Former President Teddy Roosevelt's son Quentin was shot down and killed behind enemy lines on July 14, 1918. He was buried by the Germans near the crash site.

Quentin's death, at age 20, was a severe blow to his parents. Three months after the death Teddy Roosevelt wrote to the Army Chief of Staff, General Payton March, requesting that Quentin's body not be returned to the United States. Roosevelt wrote that "we have always believed that where the tree falls, there let it lay."

With the end of the war in sight the United States government began the process of offering to return to the United States the remains of soldiers buried in France. Roosevelt's letter ran in the *New York Times* and in papers across the country. The phrases "where the tree falls, there let it lay" struck a chord with grieving American families, and about 34,000 fallen, or missing, soldiers were allowed to remain buried on foreign soil. The United States established eight permanent cemeteries in France and England and there reburied servicemen from other cemeteries.

Visiting these cemeteries was out of the question for the vast number of American families. Veterans groups and private organizations after the war provided funding for families to visit the cemeteries in Europe. The United States Lines, the American steamship company, offered low-cost package trips.

The term "Gold Star Mother" was well known prior to the end of the war. Many families flew flags with a single blue star symbolizing their son who was overseas. As casualties mounted it became common to see a gold star displayed for the fallen serviceman.

Throughout the 1920's Congress debated the issue of government-funded trips to the foreign cemeteries. Eventually, President Coolidge signed a bill in 1929 that would provide for all expenses for Gold Star Mothers to visit the cemeteries. The trips would take place over a four year period from 1930-1934. The trips were commonly referred to as "pilgrimages." Mothers and widows were to be accommodated. Other guests would have to pay their own way.

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The Army Quartermaster Corps made all the arrangements and conducted the pilgrimages. Hotels and railway tickets were provided. 30,000 letters were sent to eligible women inviting them to participate. Fewer than half of those eligible accepted the invitation.

The Corps divided the women into “parties” from the same section of the country. There was some fear that even though the Civil War was 65 years in the past that there might be conflict between the women of the North and the South.

Trips began and ended in New York City. Hotel accommodations prior to departure were provided. Busses would take the women to Hoboken Harbor in New Jersey to start on their voyages on the luxury steamers of the United States Lines.



Figure 19. Gold Star Mothers. Sarah Glasgow Thompson 2nd from right, front row.

They disembarked at Cherbourg and took special trains to Paris. A day or two was spent in Paris sightseeing and included a visit to the French Tomb of the Unknown at the *Arc de Triomphe*. The women were then divided into groups to go to the specific cemeteries where their sons and husbands were buried. Three days were set aside for the cemetery visits. Each pilgrim was escorted each day to the gravesite by an officer. They were provided with flowers and a chair.

There were no speeches or ceremonies at the cemeteries.

Some of the members of the first group of pilgrims stopped at the grave of Quentin Roosevelt. Hugh's mother, Sarah Glasgow Thompson, was in the first group of mothers, but it is not known whether she was among those who visited Roosevelt's grave or not.³⁵²

Sarah Glasgow Thompson returned to the United States, June 6, 1930, with 226 other mothers and widows who were in the first group of Gold Star mothers to make the trip to France. As they disembarked from the liner *President Harding*, they were confronted by the Press. One remarked that, "to see those rows and rows of crosses, to see the black crosses of the German dead, would be the greatest appeal that I know for world peace. I think that this was the feeling of most of the mothers – that the loss was not in vain if it will end war."

The New York Times added, "this sentiment was echoed by Mrs. Sarah G. Thompson of 224 East Forty-ninth Street, who stood by the grave of her son, Lieutenant Hugh S. Thompson of the Ninety-sixth Aero Squadron who was shot down over St. Mihiel in September 1918. She also placed a wreath on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Paris, sent in her care by Clarence Chamberlin, the transatlantic flier."³⁵³

There is a cenotaph in the churchyard of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, 1100 Sumter Street, Columbia, S.C. in memory of Hugh. It is in the lot shared by Hugh's grandfather, Governor Hugh S. Thompson, and other members of the Governor's family. The monument reads:

In Memoriam Hugh Smith Thompson, 3rd, 1st Lieut. 96th
Aero Squadron, American Expeditionary Force. Born
Nashville, Tenn. Feb. 6, 1895, killed in aerial combat
near Conflans, France, Sept. 16, 1918. His remains rest
in the American Cemetery of St. Mihiel, Thiaucourt,
Meurthe-et-Moselle, France.³⁵⁴

³⁵² Graham, John, "Quentin Roosevelt and the Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages," *Over the Front*, Fall 2004, p. 222-236.

³⁵³ *The New York Times*, June 7, 1930. Chamberlin flew from New York to Germany two weeks after Lindbergh flew from New York to Paris in 1927.

³⁵⁴ 34° 00'04.90 N 81° 01'52.33 W

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Thompson, Hugh S		White	
(Surname)	(Christian name)	OFFICER-ORG	
Residence	22 E. 45 St	New York	NEW YORK
	(Street and house number)	(Town or city)	(State)
* Born in	Nashville Tenn	Feb 5, 1895	
† Called into active service as	2nd Lt ASSC	Jan 11/18 Fr ERC	† Training Can...
Promotions:	1 Lt		
Organizations and staff assignments:	96 Aero Sq to death		
Principal stations:	AEF.		
† Engagements:	St Mihiel		
‡ Served overseas	Commission to death		
¶ Died (date)	Pienne near Briest St Mihiel	Sept 16/18	
	of wounds received in action at St Mihiel		
Buried at	Cem #454 G.R.S. #389		
Person notified of death	Mrs S.G. Thompson mother		
	(Name and relationship)		
	22 E. 45 St N.Y.C.		
	(No. and street or rural route)	(City, town, or post office)	(State)
Other wounds received in action:			
REMARKS:	Enl Serv		

Form No. 84c-7
A. G. O.
Mar. 17, 1921.

* Give place and date. † Insert (a) grade; (b) arm or staff corps or department; (c) date; (d) source, civil life (CL), RA, NG, ORC, NA; and (e) designation of training camp attended, if any. ‡ Strike out if he did not attend a training camp. § Give dates of departure from and return to the United States. || If none, so state.

Figure 20. Service record of Hugh Smith Thompson. New York, Abstracts of World War I Military Service, 1917-1919. Adjutant General's Office, Series B0808.

CHAPTER 24

96TH AERO SQUADRON TODAY

As we have seen, the 96th Aero Squadron was organized on August 20, 1917. It went through several name changes until it was inactivated on April 1, 1963. The squadron was reactivated on October 1, 1993. During WWII it saw combat flying missions with B-17s and B-25s in the Mediterranean and European Theaters. After WWII it flew B-29s and later B-52s. In September 1996, the squadron deployed and launched attacks flying B-52s against military targets in Iraq. Currently, it operates B-52Hs out of Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana as “96th Bomb Squadron.”

On the 100th anniversary of the June 12, 1918 bombing mission to Dommary-Baroncourt, the squadron flew a B-52 from its base in Barksdale, Louisiana over the original target in France.³⁵⁵ The B-52 from the 96th Bomb Squadron was joined by French Dassault Mirage 2000D fighters.³⁵⁶

The mission of the 96th Bomb Squadron is to “provide worldwide combat capability with a force of B-52 aircraft, aircrews, and operations personnel supporting JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] nuclear and conventional taskings, capable of projecting B-52 global firepower at a moment’s notice, anytime, anywhere. First to Bomb!”

The vision of the squadron is “The Red Devils – A team of preeminent war fighters, first in defense for America.”³⁵⁷

One can only imagine the wonder, the amazement, the awe, and most of all the pride Hugh Smith Thompson and the men of the 96th Aero Squadron of 1918 would feel could they know the tremendous extent to which their squadron has grown. And, the squadron still carries their Red Devil insignia.

³⁵⁵ The Barksdale AFB website indicates erroneously that the first bombing target was Etain, France. Factually, the target was the railway yard at Dommary-Baroncourt, 5.5 miles to the NNE.

<https://www.barksdale.af.mil/News/Article/1551095/96th-bomb-squadron-historic-flight/>, accessed August 15, 2019

³⁵⁶ <https://www.barksdale.af.mil/Units/2OG/96BS/>, accessed August 15, 2019

³⁵⁷ <https://www.barksdale.af.mil/Units/2OG/96BS/>, accessed August 15, 2019.

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Today, on each modern U.S. bombing mission, seen through a gray veil in the distance ahead, always ahead and leading, there is a flight of five worn out Breguets partially obscured by the mists of time, bearing the Red Devil insignia of the 96th Aero Squadron.

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- exhibition of the 'Globe Trot.' See also editions of Feb. 13, p. 34 and Feb. 16, p. 9. Feb 16th describes Hugh Thompson as "director of dancing at the Strand Roof."
- "All Units of Guard Go South This Week," *New York Times*, June 29, 1916, p. 2.
- "Cavalry Troops Leave For Texas," *New York Times*, June 30, 1916, p. 2.
- "Gen. O'Ryan Off for the Border, Leaves with Staff on Special Train to Take Personal Command of N.Y. Guard, More Cavalry Troops Go," *New York Times*, July 2, 1916, p. 4.
- "Strand Roof Garden Raided by Police," *New York Times*, January 10, 1917. This establishment at Broadway and Forty-seventh St. may have been the place where Hugh S. Thompson was a dancer prior to the war. The raid mentioned in the article has nothing to do with Hugh S. Thompson, it only locates the place of his employment.
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- "Aviation School List Cut," *New York Times*, June 12, 1917, p. 4.
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- "In Memory of Lieut. Thompson," *New York Times*, January 12, 1919, p. 22.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much is owed to the League of World War I Aviation Historians. The League's journal *Over the Front* provided useful information. *Over the Front* Managing Editor Michael J. O'Neal supplied much encouragement as well as practical information and source recommendations. Through the kindness and generosity of many knowledgeable World War I historians, I received many invaluable insights as well as source materials and photographs. These kind souls include Steve Suddaby, Carl Bobrow, Steve Russell, Dan Polglaze, Lucian Morareau, Bruno, Greg VanWyngarden and Russ Gannon. Kees Kort graciously provided photographs from his marvelous collection. Distant cousin Louise S. Thoman offered a brilliant suggestion for the title. Gwynedd Thomas Webster supplied a great lift when one was needed. Jack Thompson provided photographs and insights. An early draft of the book was read by historian and novelist Jim Littlefield who made major and important suggestions that dramatically improved the narrative and rescued it from the abyss. Without the invaluable help of my wife Sue who innumerable times guided me out of the woods when I was lost, and continually worked her magic with the computer, this project would have been abandoned long ago. Naturally, despite the assistance from so many people all errors are mine alone.

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Lt. Hugh S. Thompson belonged to the famous 96th Aero Squadron in World War I. The story of the squadron in 1918 is also his story. Hugh Thompson was one of the ten men who flew five worn out Breguet aircraft into history on the afternoon of June 12, 1918 when they bombed the railway yards at Dommery-Baroncourt, France, completing the first ever U.S. military bombing mission. For three months the 96th Aero Squadron was the only operational U.S. bombing squadron. The squadron's record is one of success, failure, heavy casualties and courage.



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